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## A "wealth of hallowed memories": The development of mission, saga, and distinctiveness at the Virginia Military Institute

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saga, and distinctiveness at the Virginia Military Institute**

**Loope, David Roger, Ed.D.**

**The College of William and Mary, 1993**

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**A "WEALTH OF HALLOWED MEMORIES":  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MISSION, SAGA, AND DISTINCTIVENESS  
AT THE VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE**

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**A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the School of Education  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia**

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**In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education**

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**by  
David Roger Loope  
December 1993**


A "WEALTH OF HALLOWED MEMORIES":  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MISSION, SAGA, AND DISTINCTIVENESS  
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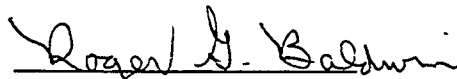
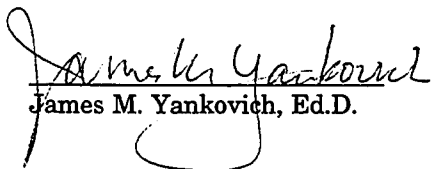
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Approved December 1993 by



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John R. Thelin, Ph.D.  
Chair of Doctoral Committee

  
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James M. Yankovich, Ed.D.

To CHL--for her support and encouragement

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## Photographs

1. Francis H. Smith, Superintendent of VMI, 1839 - 1889 (in Confederate Army uniform)
2. Cadet Marcellus N. Moorman, Class of 1856
3. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, 1850 - 1863
4. Scott Shipp, Commander of Cadets at New Market; Commandant of the Institute; Superintendent of VMI, 1890 - 1907
5. Cadet J. Beverly Stanard; mortally wounded at the Battle of New Market, May 15, 1864
6. Cadets of the Class of 1867 and veterans of the Battle of New Market
7. The ruins of the VMI barracks in the aftermath of Union General David Hunter's June 12, 1864, burning of the Institute
8. George Washington Custis Lee, Professor of Civil and Military Engineering and Applied Mechanics, 1865 - 1870

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MISSION, SAGA, AND DISTINCTIVENESS AT VMI  
ABSTRACT

This study seeks to discover the elements in Virginia Military Institute's past that have proven most influential in guiding and preserving its present-day distinctive culture. Integral to the overarching theory behind this dissertation is the assumption that VMI's history is closely linked with the history of Virginia and of the American South.

Specifically, the study hypothesizes that Virginia Military was heavily reliant upon Virginia state government from the time of its founding in 1839 through the Civil War. However, the war provided the circumstances by which the Institute could claim its own "place in history." The Battle of New Market, in which cadets from the Institute fought and died in support of the Confederate cause, gave VMI a substantive past separate from, yet tethered to, Virginia history and the history of the South. After the war, the Institute cultivated its own ideology and traditions, creating what Burton Clark terms "an institutional saga." Self-realization of this saga, coupled with its external recognition by alumni, forged the distinctiveness exhibited by Virginia Military today. In turn, this distinctiveness, preserved by a conservative ideology, created an institutional atmosphere reluctant to embrace change.

DAVID ROGER LOOPE

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THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY IN VIRGINIA



## The Lost Cause

Oh! say not that our "cause" is "lost,"  
Exult not in our pain,  
For they who war for truth and right  
Can never war in vain.  
The precious seed may hidden lie;  
But, sown in faith and prayer,  
From wintry storms spring to life,  
And a rich harvest bear.

Then gather treasures from the wreck,  
Ere yet oblivion sweep  
Our wealth of hallowed memories  
Into the voiceless deep.  
And let us sadly, proudly wear  
The gems, while life shall last,  
And heirlooms, to our children leave  
These jewels of the past.

--Sara Henderson Smith  
VMI, 1865

**A "Wealth of Hallowed Memories":  
The Development of Mission, Saga, and Distinctiveness  
at the Virginia Military Institute**

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Robert Penn Warren concludes his fictional account of Huey P. Long's rise and fall, All the King's Men, with a poetic, perhaps even fatalistic prophecy rendered by the novel's main character, Jack Burden: ". . . and soon now we shall go out of the house and go into the convulsion of the world, out of history and into history and the awful responsibility of Time" (438). At one level, Burden sums up his realization that he must return to the world, despite his cynicism and distrust of the American political process and of human nature as a whole. However, at another, more abstract level, the character speaks for a generation of southern writers who were desperately trying to identify the cultural and historical patterns that constituted the American South. Here, Warren succeeds where few if any before or after have: he characterizes the South, embodied by a character he calls "Burden," as a culture weighted down with with the "responsibility of Time"--its own history.

History, then, becomes a central, dominating theme and component in southern identity. The past as something that has a tangible influence on the present and the future is a fact of life in southern culture. Warren warns the reader that southerners and their institutions may hide from their common past, but they can never hope to escape it completely; to this extent, they are living representations of where they are from and of the history of that place. Whether a blessing or a curse, southerners and southern institutions are forever imbued with their history and with all the baggage, grotesque as well as glorious, that it encompasses.

This is a very important concept to remember when dealing with any person, place, or institution that has links with a defined "southern culture." The topic of this study, the Virginia Military Institute, has such ties. As the second oldest military college in the United States (West Point, founded in 1802, is the oldest), VMI, founded in 1839, reflects the heritage and attitudes of its native southern culture in its own culture, traditions, legends, and myths. In fact, Virginia Military has taken care to cultivate its past more carefully than many other institutions in the South. As a result, the past of the American South is perhaps more alive in present-day VMI than in any other college or university in the states of the old Confederacy.

Under this assumption, Jack Burden's words take on a new and more specific meaning. As a southern college, VMI also must bear the "awful responsibility of Time." Likewise, as an observer of time in the past tense, the historian must realize that a knowledge of Virginia Military's past is absolutely necessary for understanding anything and everything that relates to the school today--from court cases to basketball courts. Most important in achieving this understanding is an awareness that Virginia Military exemplifies what Burton Clark calls "the distinctive college." Also, since VMI's distinctive institutional culture has changed little in the last one hundred years, understanding VMI today means understanding VMI as it was in the last century. **Thus, we come to the critical question that prompted this study: institutionally, which elements in Virginia Military's past have proven most influential in guiding and preserving its present-day distinctive culture and the actions this culture precipitates?** To discover this, I have constructed an institutional history that traces the evolution of institutional mission, saga, and distinctiveness at VMI during the nineteenth century (1816 to 1890).

## **Hypothesis**

Events leading to the establishment of Virginia Military Institute prior to 1839 and events and campus culture from establishment to 1861 portray VMI as heavily dependent upon Virginia state government, not only for financial support, but for its institutional mission and identity and for approval of institutional application of mission. This reliance also tied the evolution of VMI's institutional saga to that of the southern culture in which Virginia played such a prominent role. However, during the Civil War (1861 to 1865), events outside the Institute's control--events in which the Institute was directly involved--gave the school a claim to a unique place in history among American colleges and universities. Specifically, the Battle of New Market in 1864, in which the Institute fought en masse as a Confederate battalion, and the subsequent destruction of the Institute by Union troops, provided VMI with its own substantive past, its own history distinct from yet tethered to that of Virginia culture, Virginia government, and the culture of the South. From 1866 to 1890, Virginia Military cultivated its own set of traditions, legends, myths--in short its own distinctive institutional culture and saga--by venerating its Civil War legacies. Simultaneously, the Institute evolved from its heavy reliance on Virginia state government to a semi-autonomous institution of higher learning and took on many of the cultural attributes indigenous to other colleges and universities during the late nineteenth century. In this way, one may truly say that VMI moved "out of history" (as a passive entity among the culture of the Old South) and "into history" (as a player in the struggle between the states and as an entity that had established a distinctive character wedded to its own past).

### **Significance**

Primarily, this study can provide one example of how institutional saga develops and matures. The story of VMI in the nineteenth century is, in some ways, one of increasing institutional awareness of heritage and culture. The Institute provides an excellent example of the notion of evolving institutional saga, the topic of Burton Clark's work, The Distinctive

College. Tracing this emerging self-concept at one college helps us recognize generalities in the process and provides clearer understanding of institutional personalities. It is the ultimate intent of this work to act as a reference for understanding many of the reasons for the Institute's actions in the 1990's.

Also, at a broader level, historical study gives the scholar the ability to view the arc of where we have been and to make future decisions informed of our common past. More than that, though, history can provide us with a glimpse into human nature, into how human beings react and adapt to different phenomena through time. It is for this reason, if for no other, that history is an art form as well as a science. Art gives us an understanding of our commonalities as well as an appreciation for the idiosyncracies that symbolize the individuality of the human spirit. "Good" history, then, should strive to acquaint us with the great forces that sweep through the human experience over time as well as striving to disclose how these forces have affected individuals and specific social entities in each particular era.

The purpose of this study to propagate "good" history. Virginia Military, despite its relative obscurity in many circles, nevertheless witnessed one of the most dramatic chapters in American history--the Civil War and Reconstruction. One must remember that as a social institution caught up in the incredible events of its day, nineteenth century VMI promises the social historian an opportunity for viewing how huge forces affect one American institution (higher education) in the middle and late nineteenth centuries.

Moreover, by studying individual students, faculty, and administrators at the school during the nineteenth century, we can begin to understand how college and university campuses dealt with monumental changes in the society that surrounded them--changes whose impact we feel even today. And, while cadets in 1861 may have reacted somewhat differently

to these changes, their attitudes and behaviors still reflect timeless aspects of human nature that give us insight into the campus attitudes of today. In other words, we can learn from an historical study of Virginia Military how events from the last century are still shaping southern colleges and universities even in our own time.

### **Theoretical Framework**

No analytical history can pass critical muster without using some overarching theory to explain the author's conclusions and assumptions about events, people, and places. If anything, historical theory gives sentences life and provides the meaning that history strives to bring to seemingly disjointed occurrences. Toward this end, I include in this section reviews of important topical works that have informed my thinking on key historical, educational, political, and sociological issues specific to the VMI saga (e.g., Reconstruction, college life in the antebellum South). I relegate texts related to methodological theory and terminology (i.e., social history, historiography, sociology, and public policy)--texts concerned with general methodological concepts--to the Methodology section.

I have relied most heavily on three scholars, from rather different backgrounds, to draw forth my own theory on VMI history. One, C. Vann Woodward, is well-known in the academy and enjoys an established reputation in southern historiography, in particular in the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction. W.J. Cash, is perhaps best known for his only major work, The Mind of the South. As an analysis of the southern mindset and approach to the world throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I have found this work indispensable. And, for gaining an understanding of notions of institutional saga and tradition, I have turned to Burton Clark, author of the classic higher education work on the histories of Antioch, Reed, and Swarthmore, The Distinctive College.

Together these three texts and their authors have proven the most critical for shaping my thesis. I have attempted to create an amalgam of their central theories in order to adapt it to the unique research situation at hand. Within these parameters, it is important to note that this study is first and foremost an historical study of a college saga, as defined by Clark, and that the history of the South and of southern traditions are important here only as they relate to this saga.

In The Burden of Southern History, the primary work by Woodward upon which I rely, the author combines several essays on the nature of southern history, most tied to the inescapable factor of the Civil War. In his opening essay, "The Search for Southern Identity," Woodward establishes his belief that the south has developed a unique regional identity that arose from the suffering and loss of the Civil War. As the most calamitous event in American history, the War Between the States has left a permanent legacy of fatalism and anger in southern society. For Woodward, southerners, at least to some extent, always define themselves in relation to the War and its effect on their home region (Burden 16, 21). Or in Woodward's words, "Southern history, unlike American history, includes large components of frustration, failure, and defeat" (19).

Also, in the chapter entitled "The Irony of Southern History," Woodward establishes the South's difference from the rest of American history, both geographically and experientially. "...[T]he South had undergone an experience that it could share with no other part of America--though it is shared by nearly all the peoples of Europe and Asia--the experience of military defeat, occupation, and reconstruction" (Burden 190).

Virginia Military Institute's identity, like that of the culture from which it arose, also finds its central, galvanizing experience in the Civil War: the Battle of New Market in 1864.



I have applied Woodward's theory on the history of the South to help establish my own theory on VMI, namely, that New Market and the Civil War gave VMI a decidedly unique experiential base from which to construct an institutional identity; no other college or university can claim such a history. Afterall, the Institute had fought for the South as an institution, not just as a college unit like the University Grays from Ole Miss or schoolboy units from schools such as William and Mary and the University of Virginia. No, the Corp fought for the honor of VMI as well as for Virginia and the South. To this extent, VMI, like its parent culture, found definition and meaning as a result of its Civil War experience.

Cash shares some of the ideas of Woodward relating to the definition of southern identity, but carries some of them to another level. For Cash, the "southern mind," as he labels the attitudes and beliefs that make up the southern psyche, changed forever after the Civil War. He suggests that southern culture applies shared antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction experiences to modern phenomena. In other words, after Reconstruction, as early as the late nineteenth century, the southern mind began drawing upon antebellum traditions, along with Civil War and Reconstruction legacies, in constructing its identity. It combined events from its prewar and postwar pasts in dealing with the modern world. Moreover, the Civil War is the pivotal event upon which these legacies hinge. In its purest form, the War separates the Old South from the New South and gives southerners a unified historical experience. Cash explains this correlation by telling his readers that:

"we shall have to begin by noting that it was the conflict with the Yankee which really created the concept of the South as something more than a matter of geography, as an object of patriotism, in the minds of Southerners" (68).

Also, according to Cash, the South after Reconstruction still relied upon many antebellum traditions for perpetuating ideals of southern culture. He writes of the Progressive movement in the South near the turn of the century that "[s]o far from representing a deliberate break with the past, the turn to Progress clearly flowed straight out of that past and

constituted in a real sense an emanation from the will to maintain the South in its essential integrity" (183).

I claim in this study that Virginia Military, as a product of southern culture, also borrowed heavily from its relationship with Virginia state government before the War and, along with other antebellum traditions, combined this legacy with its experiences during the Civil War to forge a new identity for itself after the close of the War. In essence, Virginia Military "modified" its past relationship with the state in Virginia to reflect its Civil War experience. Also, tied as closely as it was to the Commonwealth government, and acting as trainer and crucial component of the state militia, VMI became equally attached to the southern traditions that this government so carefully guarded--and ultimately to the southern rebellion. After the war, when it began to foster its own traditions, VMI cultivated this link to the Old South and joined the Zeitgeist fast enveloping the New South.

Just as the works of Woodward and Cash provide the historical theory that serves to guide much of my own theory in this study, the work of noted higher education scholar, Burton R. Clark, has proven extremely helpful in helping me develop an historical theory related directly to a specific college. Most notably, Clark's The Distinctive College centers on the common evolution of "distinctive" colleges. Specifically, he sees "a strong saga or legend as the central ingredient of the distinctive college" (234). Clark goes on to theorize that this saga takes time to develop and does so only under certain favorable conditions. For example, the author feels that "when the leaders attempt to seize a role (or have forced upon them a dynamic social assignment that requires strong effort to define and establish purpose), we may usefully speak of an organizational mission. . .[S]uccessful missions in time become organizational sagas" (234).

More than this, though, Clark reveals how institutional sagas are inherently historical in nature. They take time to evolve and time is the critical component in any history. Therefore, saga is reliant on history and cannot exist without it--the two are intrinsically linked (235). Or, as Clark writes, "the institutional saga is an historically based, somewhat embellished understanding of a unique organizational development" (235). As a process, this saga creates "distinction." For Clark, the process takes five specific steps:

1. "Believers collect in the faculty and gain the power to protect the cherished ideals and practices[;]
2. "features of the curriculum determining everyday behavior, reflect and express the saga[;]
3. "a social base of external behaviors provides resources,including moral support, and interests a certain kind of student in the college[;]
4. "the students develop a strong subculture that significantly incorporates the central idea of the college [; and,]
5. "the saga itself--an ideology, self-image, and public image--has forceful momentum" (246).

Note that Clark believes all components of the campus community are involved in producing an institutional saga. Students, faculty, administrators and even the public take part in the saga. I have tried to convey the same sense in studying all these parts of the Virginia Military experience.

I contend that Virginia Military Institute qualifies as one of Clark's distinctive colleges. At least after the Civil War, VMI proceeded through a process much like that which Clark describes. This is the topic of the latter chapters in this study. Moreover, the battle of New Market represents the type of "forced. . . dynamic social assignment" that leads toward the development of saga. However, the development of this type of college culture is only one segment, albeit the most important one, in the VMI story. One must remember that while the VMI of the post Civil War years (up to today, in fact) fits this description, the pre Civil War

VMI does not. VMI had a mission, true, but one that relied on orders from state government rather than from its own leadership. Thus, mission and ultimately saga result from autonomous or semi-autonomous action on the part of the institution itself.

In addition to these three central works, to which I will refer many times throughout the study, there are also a few other important works that have proven helpful in establishing a workable theory of VMI history. These texts provide theoretical insight on historical, sociological, political, and educational areas relevant to an institutional history of VMI but are not written on the same broad scale as the Woodward, Cash, and Clark texts. Still, they help comprise the foundation of secondary theoretical sources that underlies my entire hypothesis. As a result, within certain sections, they are as important to achieving an adequate understanding of primary sources as are the three "core" books reviewed above.

Much in the same vein as Burton Clark's The Distinctive College, Piety and Intellect at Amherst College gives a broad-based historical account of Amherst's cultivation of campus saga and tradition. In addition to learning from the historical methodology that the author, Thomas LeDuc, employs, I also found the opening section on tradition in higher education helpful in formulating my own thoughts of how traditions at VMI arose. LeDuc writes that

"[t]radition, embodying the experience of organized higher education, plays an obvious and inescapable part in the making of the college, but with it alone the college becomes sterile. . .It is from the community that the college draws vitality. . .If the college ignore tradition, it sails an uncharted sea; if it isolate itself from life, it becomes lifeless" (1).

As with Clark's process for the creation of saga, LeDuc's "dialectic" (1) between community and tradition is also a process. LeDuc also believes that external forces drive tradition to adapt itself to new phenomena, thus changing the overall culture of the institution. I adopt a similar idea in attempting to explain the evolution of saga/culture at Virginia Military.

Two works on the antebellum college in the south were extremely useful in gaining an appreciation for the everyday life of students, faculty, and administrators prior to the Civil War. The first of these, an excellent history of campus life at the University of Georgia from roughly 1795 to 1860, E. Merton Coulter's College Life in the Old South, is perhaps most important in describing the rituals and routines that permeated colleges during this era. Moreover, Coulter devotes an entire chapter to the relationship between the struggling University and state government. To this extent, the work is an important source for delineating the political and public policy aspects of the antebellum southern college. Coulter's portrayal of a college forced to beg for every penny and dime contrasts sharply from the VMI experience and suggests to the reader that government had definite ideas about what higher education should achieve for it--notably, some tangible benefit (not unlike VMI's training of militia officers).

Another work, an anthologized essay by Jon L. Wakelyn entitled "Antebellum College Life and the Relations Between Fathers and Sons," which appears in The Web of Southern Social Relations, has proven useful in isolating information on the family lives of students during the era. By tracing how father/son relationships affected the missions of colleges and how they provided a generalized expectation of what college should entail, Wakelyn shows that social forces in the south played key roles in the life of the southern college. Wakelyn suggests that sectional loyalties and ties to home states were extremely important factors in campus life (116). The same loyalty, instilled by long-standing family allegiances to the home state, is a central component in VMI's early history.

Two works by historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown explore social relations in the antebellum South even more fully. Honor and Violence in the Old South and Southern Honor have proven critical in gaining an historical/sociological understanding of notions central to

southern culture--notions equally intrinsic to the VMI experience. Wyatt-Brown believes that the ceaseless need for defending honor in the South led to the increasing need for violence in southern culture (Southern Honor 34). He also believes that honor was the central code of conduct in the Old South (Southern Honor 34). With these ideas in mind, I contend that one component of Virginia Military Institute in the nineteenth century is its institutional representation of the combination of honor and violence inherent in southern culture. Strongly tied to a state government that often symbolized the southern way of life (Cash, Mind 5-8), VMI naturally subsumed several aspects of this culture into its own early campus culture.

I have also tapped into an additional source that deals with socio-historical aspects of the Reconstruction, namely the emergence of a new southern culture after the Civil War. Paul Gaston, in The New South Creed, looks at the combination of factors that entered into the creation of an entirely new set of perspectives on the world among Reconstruction-era southerners. Gaston claims that the South established a new system of myths to make sense of the trials and tribulations through which it was forced to pass (9). Specifically, southerners synthesized ideals of the Old South with the realities of the Reconstruction South and created a "myth system" for placing the late nineteenth century in perspective. Gaston's work has been useful in fortifying my own theory on the synthesis of cultural elements into institutional saga at Virginia Military. Moreover, I also believe that Reconstruction plays a prominent role in the creation of this new myth system.

And, finally, another text that I have found indispensable for concise vignettes of life in the American South during any era is the mammoth Encyclopedia of Southern Culture. Organized topically, this comprehensive work is especially beneficial for the social historian, despite a few instances of reductionism. In particular, I have found the sections on education, the "mythic south," and the "fighting south" most useful.

## **Narrative Histories**

Naturally, I have also depended on several narrative histories for the solid factual grounding upon which to construct new historical theory. These texts fall into two categories: works relating directly to the history of Virginia Military Institute and works related to the historical period this study covers (1816 to 1890).

Among the histories of Virginia Military that prove the most helpful, two are comprehensive scholarly works and another is essentially a firsthand account of evolving saga. William Couper's monumental, four volume One Hundred Years at V.M.I. is an important source for understanding the people and dates that characterize the building blocks of the Virginia Military saga. In his excellent grasp of individual events and facts, Couper provides the modern historian of VMI with a wide range of source material (despite the fact that he fails to provide any substantial bibliography).

A more recent work, A Crowd of Honorable Youth, is a compilation of essays on various topics related to the first 150 years of the Institute's history. All in all, this is the most scholarly work on the VMI story. The chapters on the history of VMI uniforms and academic programs as well as descriptions of VMI on the eve of the Civil War and in its semicentennial year (1889) are all extremely revealing and, for the most part, fairly well done. Much like Couper, though, some of the material is a bit biographical in nature and thus somewhat limited in its application beyond the casual interest of alumni. Nevertheless, Thomas Davis, the editor, does a skillful job of integrating the many different social and historical elements that characterize VMI into a coherent topical history.

Francis Smith was the founding superintendent of VMI and remained at that post until 1889. Given the length and nature of these years, Smith is probably single-handedly

responsible for the success of the Institute as well as for the cultural direction that it took. Moreover, Smith wrote a history of the Institute that spans his tenure as executive entitled Virginia Military Institute, Its Building and Rebuilding. The work is an important one for understanding the background for many of the school's well-ensconced traditions and rites. And, of course, the work is also important as a primary source relating to the beliefs and ideas of the Institute's most important leader.

A few other works are of some limited use in gaining an understanding of the school in the nineteenth century. Jennings G. Wise, in his account of The Military History of the Virginia Military Institute From 1839 - 1865, devotes most of his study to VMI during the Civil War and to the exploits of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, a VMI faculty member prior to the War. Also of considerable interest is Wise's inclusion of several Confederate Army general orders that relate to VMI. Still, the work lacks the objectivity of scholarly narrative and for this reason is useful only in a few specific areas (i.e., the State of Virginia's military relationship to the Institute).

Central to the thesis of my study are the events of the Battle of New Market, in which cadets from the Institute fought as a distinct battalion. William C. Davis's The Battle of New Market is an excellent secondary source for covering the events that led up to the battle, the battle itself, and, most importantly for my own study, VMI's role in the battle. In essence, I have relied heavily on the work for gaining bibliographic source material for documenting the Corps role at New Market as well as for gaining an additional historical perspective on where VMI fitted into the Confederate Army's overall strategic scheme.

Another interesting work, Fragments of V.M.I. History, includes several short essays by U.S. military personnel (alumni of VMI) as well as VMI administrators and faculty on



different aspects of school history. Published in 1933, the work includes informative studies of the "rat" system as well as an early history of VMI athletics. In this context, the work is most useful as a general descriptor of social life at VMI during several different eras.

Henry A. Wise's Drawing Out The Man is also a comprehensive history of VMI from its founding up to the late 1970's. Wise's chapters are mostly anecdotal in nature and suffer the same lack of scholarship as most of the other histories related to the Institute. This is not to say that the work does not serve a purpose: it is designed for alumni and as such gives the critical reader a perspective on how alumni view VMI history. Also, Wise provides a concise rendering of events surrounding the Institute from its founding in 1839 to 1861--a thumbnail sketch of major events and players.

In addition to these house histories, I believe that including other types of secondary historical sources may also prove important in assuring a diverse treatment of institutional culture at VMI. Jacob and Arnold's A Virginia Military Institute Album, 1839-1910 is one such study. Their use of photographs and other contemporary, visual renderings of campus life provides an excellent feel for the changes that undoubtedly occurred at VMI during the 71 years they study. Also, these photographs enable the scholar to criticize, even dispel, some of the erroneous campus perspectives that house histories occasionally provide. For this same reason, I have decided to include photographs in this study.

Equally important in understanding the composite change in VMI during the nineteenth century is a study of its extracurricular activities. Thomas Davis' The Corps Roots the Loudest: A History of VMI Athletics furnishes the reader with a fairly good picture of the changes in student activities after the Civil War and of how these activities interrelated with other segments of VMI culture. Moreover, Murray Edward French's compilation of poems,

songs, and stories entitled, The VMI Muse, supplies supplementary views of student, faculty, and alumni expression during the previous century.

In the area of American history, there are of course several texts from which to choose, any of which can help illuminate key periods surrounding Virginia Military's history. The sheer number of these works makes the task of choosing pertinent literature a difficult one. For the most part, I have chosen the secondary works in this area based on their comprehensive nature, the soundness of their quality or, in most cases, for both reasons. Comprehensiveness, when combined with the astounding degree of scholarship that the authors of these works exhibit, reduces the number of secondary texts referenced throughout the course of the work and lends to the overall creditability of the study.

Perhaps the most important single narrative work upon which I have relied for historical context is the multi-volume A History of the South. First published by LSU in the 1950's, the volumes in the series paint a truly exhaustive picture of the American South from the eighteenth century to the mid- twentieth century. In particular, I have consulted (to different degrees) five volumes: volume four, Thomas Abernethy's The South in the New Nation; volume five, Charles S. Sydnor's The Development of Southern Sectionalism; volume six, Avery Craven's The Growth of Southern Nationalism; volume eight, E. Merton Coulter's The South During Reconstruction, and volume nine, C. Vann Woodward's Origins of the New South. Each of these works tells the story of its period with special emphasis on the southern perspective. That is to say, each author documents both the historical events during a specific period while also reviewing the way that southerners viewed these changes in their culture. Moreover, these volumes isolate the southern experience, see it as different from the rest of the American experience, and, as a result, give the reader a better understanding of the patterns and idiosyncracies indigenous to southern history and the southern culture.

In general, I have consulted only one main text on the history of the Commonwealth of Virginia: Louis Rubin Jr.'s Virginia: A History. This work is both concise and well-written. Rubin provides an excellent overview of the main events of Virginia history without burdening the reader with unimportant anecdotes and other minutiae. And, importantly, Rubin provides the necessary American history context for each of his chapters on Virginia history.

In the area of American history, I have chosen two main, multivolume works that provide comprehensive summaries of events between 1815 and 1900. To many scholars, Page Smith's massive People's History of the United States is the definitive, modern narrative of American history. Specifically, I have consulted three volumes: The Shaping of America: A People's History of the Young Republic (volume three, 1783 to 1826), The Nation Comes of Age: A People's History of the Ante-Bellum Years (volume four, 1826 to 1861), and Trial By Fire: A People's History of the Civil War and Reconstruction (volume five, 1861 to 1877). I have found these volumes indispensable for the accurate delineation of pertinent dates, people, and events.

Also, for historical events related specifically to the Civil War, including the Battle of New Market and Virginia Military's role in the Shenandoah Valley campaign, I have referred to Shelby Foote's three-volume Civil War: A Narrative. Specifically, volume three, From Red River to Appomattox, includes an excellent, concise rendering of the New Market battle as well as a generalized view of the Corps. Importantly, too, Foote is interested primarily in telling the story of the Civil War, not of VMI. Thus, his portrayal of the Institute within the context of the great, sweeping historical forces that surrounded its involvement in the Shenandoah campaign essentially helps the VMI historian to place the Institute's role in a proper perspective.

## **Methodology**

An effective institutional history should try to incorporate a variety methodologies in order to paint an holistic portrait of the subject. Thomas Dyer, in his chapter entitled "Higher Education in the South Since the Civil War" in The Web of Southern Social Relations, laments that "the most common failing of the institutional history has been its inability to place the institution under study into social, political, cultural, and historiographical contexts" (129). With this warning in mind, I have tried to employ elements from two different disciplines (history and sociology) and one interdisciplinary field of study (public policy) into this study of Virginia Military. In one fashion or another, these three areas match or subsume the "contexts" Dyer mentions.

## **Historical**

Roughly speaking there are three distinct types of historical writing: descriptive, narrative, and analytical (Elton 118). Descriptive history, as the name implies, simply describes the details of a specific time in the past without really providing either context or analysis (Elton 118).

Narrative history, on the other hand, tells the story of a person, place, or event. Intrinsic to this type of study is chronology, or movement through time. As G.R. Elton notes in The Practice of History, narrative seeks to reveal truth through the relating of events that actually occurred. To this extent, narration provides the vehicle for establishing facts in an historical study. Without narrative--the facts as revealed through primary sources--no analysis can claim to understand its subject; history becomes nothing more than fiction. Elton writes that ". . . historical facts are knowable only by the evidence they leave behind, and in many instances that evidence is not clear-cut. . . this is not a question of interpreting fact, but of establishing it. . ." (60).

However, Hayden White notes that narrative history may not always seek to analyze the story it leaves with the reader. It seeks to "establish" facts so that the reader may use them for his own purposes. Enter the third type of history, analytical, in which the historian reveals his own interpretations of the narrative, placing facts drawn from primary sources within a larger context (White 57). This study of Virginia Military is such a history.

An inherent danger of analytical history, according to White, is an overreliance on "the scientific method." Science purports to find an objective truth; history, as an interpretive process, can never ethically claim to do this. Thus, it is my intention to combine the narrative with the analytical and, in so doing, establish facts within context. Since I am not seeking to write a comprehensive history of VMI, though, I will not cover all aspects of the institution in narrative sections--only those relevant to my central thesis.

Furthermore, incumbent on any historian is the central process of seeing historiography as both science and art. In his short book, The Legacy of the Civil War, Robert Penn Warren writes of history as

"a discipline of the mind and heart, a discipline both humbling and enlarging, in the imaginative consideration of possibilities in the face of the unique facts of the irrevocable past. The asking and the answering which history provokes may help us to understand, even to frame, the logic of experience to which we shall submit. History cannot give us a program for the future, but it can give us a fuller understanding of ourselves, and of our common humanity, so that we can better face the future" (Reader 307).

Facing the future has been a particularly dramatic process for Virginia Military and to trace the development of this saga requires, as Penn Warren suggests, "a discipline of the mind and heart." Thus, my method is to look at VMI broadly and to delineate both its response to large social, historical, and political forces as well as its ability to act independently from these forces. If history is indeed the "human search for meaning", as Jacques Barzun believes (187),

then I have tried to find meaning in VMI's past. The study attempts to analyze how events and people at nineteenth century VMI are related to a central theory generated from a narrative medium.

In addition to intra-disciplinary (within the discipline) types of history, there are also inter-disciplinary types (a merging of disciplines). The most common, and the one that comes closest to describing my own combination of methodologies is labeled social history. As its name suggests, social history, is, at its simplest level, a combination of sociology and history. It is the study of society in the past. Charles Tilly, in As Sociology Meets History, defines the field as one that "takes certain features of our contemporary world as problematic and then moves back to trace the origins and transformations of those features" (212). I would not necessarily characterize all of VMI's modern features as "problematic," however, I do think that an adequate historical rendering of the "origins and transformations" of modern campus traditions and cultures is certainly lacking. And, since the Institute has changed so little in the last 100 years or so, studying modern aspects of campus culture certainly requires studying aspects of nineteenth century campus culture.

### Sociological

Any work of social history necessarily relies on some amount of sociological method as a vehicle for driving its theory. This work is no different, despite the fact that it is not a sociological study. I have tried to create a work that incorporates some modes of research indigenous to sociology along with history and political science. At certain points, then, I view Virginia Military within a social context without looking at the entirety of VMI history in this way. In order to succeed at this task, I think it is critical to establish some methodological ground rules rooted in sociological method.

There are several different schools of sociological research methodology, many of which have numerous proponents replete with well-established theories. For my limited purposes here, I will simply refer to three major schools to which I have looked for guidance relative to the sociology of education.

In their book Sociological Interpretation of Education, David Blackledge and Barry Hunt summarize the functionalist school (derived from Emile Durkheim), the Micro-interpretative approach, and the Marxist perspective on education in human society. In particular, my methodological approach to this study combines aspects of the former two schools. According to Blackledge and Hunt, the Functionalist approach to education relies heavily on the theories of Emile Durkheim. For the Functionalist, education is purely a means to an end and can be best understood by looking at the wider society. Moreover, as a social construct, education either exists at the behest of spiralling social forces as Durkheim believed (Blackledge and Hunt 13) or because of the needs of society as the functionalists believed (13).

On the other hand, the micro-interpretive school holds that individuals can and do make a difference in education and that everyday occurrences, more than large social forces, create change. Proponents of this approach hold that people create their own activity and maintain free will in their actions (234).

Simply put, I have synthesized theoretical elements from these two schools that I find useful to my own study. I see VMI as an institution that is heavily reliant upon external social forces for its mission and identity early on in its history and as one that gains a degree of autonomy and free will later in its development. Neither deterministic social forces nor VMI alone is responsible for all the school's institutional changes. Thus, I have combined parts of

functionalism with parts of micro-interpretation to achieve a type of methodological framework that meshes with own theoretical framework.

### *Definitions*

Several definitions relevant to sociological inquiry are likewise relevant to this study. I include in this section those terms that reoccur with some frequency throughout this work and that are especially pertinent to a VMI institutional history. I reserve for this section only those terms related to the study of society or to social constructs.

### *Culture*

The concept of culture holds different meanings for different people and situations. In partial reflection of that diversity, I have combined the views of different scholars to reach a working definition of the term. Burton Clark deals with the idea of campus culture throughout The Distinctive College. He provides a comprehensive definition, calling culture a sum of the values, norms, and knowledge of a group or institution (4). I have decided to adopt this definition here, too. For precise definitions of the three concepts that comprise culture, I have consulted other sociologists. Metta Spencer defines a "value" as "a standard used by members of society to judge behavior and to choose from among various possible goals" (73). She defines a "norm" as "a rule that instructs members of a society how to behave in particular situations" (73). Berger and Luckmann, in the Social Construction of Reality define knowledge as "the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics" (3). In the final wash, I contend that culture is the sum expression of a process of filtering through phenomena using preconceived values, norms, and knowledge specific to a group or institution.



## Tradition

"Education is conservative of the past. To educate is to teach and to teach means to transmit something already possessed" (179) writes Edward Shils in Tradition. Indeed, the concept of tradition is extremely important at VMI and plays an active role in the type of saga that has developed at the school. At its simplest level, tradition is "anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present" (Shils 12). Moreover, it may include "material objects, beliefs of all sorts of things, images of persons and events, practices and institutions" (12). Inherent in this rather concrete definition, though, is the assumption that those things "handed down" are indeed worthy of being handed down (13). In other words, tradition involves an amount of value judgement. Thus, I contend that traditions are those things handed down by a society to new generations that have some intrinsic, continuing worth to that society.

## Honor

Honor is a concept closely linked to both VMI and to the entirety of southern culture. As such, I have dealt with it often in explaining potential reasons for many of the Institute's actions and traditions. Bertram Wyatt-Brown has devoted two works to the relationship between honor and southern culture. It is primarily from these works, Southern Honor and Honor and Violence in the Old South, that I have drawn a definition.

To a certain degree, Wyatt-Brown feels that honor is simply following the dictates of one's society. However, he goes on to place the concept in social context, noting that honor in the nineteenth century South was really a composite of distinct social codes:

1. "primal honor (the immortalizing of valor);
2. "the opinion of others as an indispensable part of personal identity and gauge of self-worth;

3. "physical appearance and ferocity of will as signs of inner merit;
4. "defense of male integrity and mingled fear and love of women; and,
5. "reliance upon oath-taking as a bond in lieu of family obligations and allegiances" (Southern Honor 34).

In many ways, then, honor means acting in accordance with society's uncoded ideas about right and wrong. Virginia Military's own traditions and codes of behavior follow closely along these societal rules and are thus linked closely to prominent social forces outside the school's walls.

### Myth

I have incorporated Paul Gaston's definition of myth into the study: "[M]yths. . . are not polite euphemisms for falsehoods, but are combinations of images and symbols that reflect a people's way of perceiving truth" (9). Note here that Gaston does not say that the truth perceived is actually "the truth." Still, the myths that actually developed into an institutional saga at VMI gave the school an identity largely independent of other organizations--an identity based on an homogenous perception of the past among one group of people.

### Public Policy

Public policy is something of an interdisciplinary field, meaning that it does not retain its own distinct methodology. However, I have used a few important definitions central to this field of study that help clarify the relationship of government to colleges and universities, a topic central to this study. Also, the method employed by public policy analysts, to distinguish between policy and politics, is essential for understanding the role of higher education in helping plan and implement government activity.

There are numerous definitions of public policy, but one seems particularly sound in its accountability for the wide variety of influences on policy and in its conciseness. Stephen Wright defines public policy in the following way: "I like to think of public policy as being a definite course of action, carefully selected from among opinions by appropriate government bodies, to guide decisions with respect to perceived problems and needs" (Virginia Humanities 4). Note that Wright takes into account the political process by arguing that this "course of action" is "carefully selected" rather than being conceived in a vacuum. In terms of the ramifications for methodology, the political reality that accompanies policy analysis requires study of politics as well as of the policy content. Therefore, I have tried to combine, where possible, the study of VMI's relationship with Virginia government on policy matters with an analysis of the relevant political medium.

Within this framework, I also think it a good idea to keep in mind a clear-cut definition of political activity. According to Edward Hines and Leif S. Hartmark, "politics is concerned basically with patterns of interaction or conflict over values, interests, and goals relating to the perceived needs of higher education and public authority" (3). In other words, politics is the process by which policy-makers implement policy. To put this into a simple analogy, public policy is the "what" and politics is the "how." This process may entail personality conflicts, discretionary dealings, and a multitude of other "interactions" that seek to gain the "authority" necessary for implementing policy. Thus, my analysis of the VMI/state government relationship necessarily focuses on political components as well as on policy associations.

## **Organization**

In attempting to strike the right balance of attention to important issues at each juncture of VMI history, I have approached the study chronologically. After this introductory chapter, four chapters follow that document important developments in the Virginia Military

saga in distinct periods: chapter two deals with the events leading up to and surrounding the establishment of the Institute (roughly 1816 to 1839); chapter three focuses on the years 1840 to 1860; chapter four traces the Institute's actions during its most celebrated years, the Civil War (1861 to 1865); and, chapter five looks at VMI during Reconstruction and the late nineteenth century (1866 to 1890). An additional chapter, six, seeks to draw inferences from the VMI of the nineteenth century to the VMI of today.

As Borg and Gall suggest (830), I have decided to organize each chapter thematically using the following schema: government relations, academic affairs issues, student affairs, community relations, and campus environment. (Chapter two, because it deals wholly with an era before the actual operation of the Institute, does not include these sections, but, rather, details chronologically the events leading up to the founding of the Institute). It is my hope that the inclusion of this thematic approach within an overall chronological organization provides a holistic treatment of the issue of VMI saga and identity as it relates to several institutional and governmental components.

## CHAPTER TWO: FOUNDATIONS--1816 TO 1839

Colleges and universities do not mysteriously rise from the mists, fling open their gates to reveal a peculiar brand of quadrangles, oak trees, and ivy-covered dormitories, and then label themselves "distinctive." Instead, they evolve over time and they usually appear on the higher education landscape only after a long "prehistory" full of people, events, and beliefs. The case of the Virginia Military Institute is little different in this regard from most colleges. This chapter primarily deals with VMI's "prehistory"--that period from 1816 to 1839 when, save for the last few months, there was no entity called VMI.

Despite the fact that beginning a history of an institution long before its actual founding may seem a methodological oxymoron, Virginia Military is one institution whose foundations sink deep beneath the structures that comprise today's campus. Indeed, the predecessor to VMI, the Lexington arsenal, whose buildings and grounds the Institute subsumed, first appeared in 1816. But more important than the physical attributes that preceded VMI are those we cannot see--the historical, political, and cultural forces that shaped southern society, Virginia government, and eventually VMI itself. Understanding the Institute its ordered that first sentinel to stand watch in a blinding November snowstorm (Board of Visitors, House Journal 1839 Doc.1, 9) requires us to learn about more than the few months preceding its founding. It requires us to study a great many factors that helped create the Institute, whether they at first seem directly related to its establishment or not. For, in the end, many of the events usually linked with VMI's founding are not historically isolated occurrences. They existed merely as small parts in a larger web of events tied to broad social

forces. In this context, VMI truly has connections with ideals and events that shaped its home state and region long before 1839. The creation of the Institute represented one intersection (in institutional form) of several distinct yet closely related social and political strands running through the antebellum South.

Choosing the right strands to follow can prove tricky business. However, one strand, obviously thicker and stronger than the rest, seems to follow a straight line directly to the Institute's founding: the role of Virginia state government. State government (and for future reference this term connotes any arm of Virginia government--legislative, executive, or judicial) plays a major role in just about every event that helped establish the school. Indeed, most all of the major elements of VMI's "prehistory" are linked in tangible ways to government policy or state politics. This is not to say that government consciously aimed all along to create a military school; there is no evidence of such a direct tie. In fact, important individuals in the Lexington community and elsewhere in Virginia outside government were instrumental in encouraging state patronage of a military college. Government found itself swept along by current events tied closely to perceived threats to southern culture until it found the proposal for creating the school a possible solution to encroaching political and social fears. Provided a golden opportunity, it claimed a direct stake in the Institute's mission and identity and tied itself forever to VMI's institutional saga.

### **Hypothesis**

This chapter asserts that VMI's early identity, as created by the governor, the Virginia General Assembly, and individuals closely linked with state government, represented the perfect institutional marriage of state public policy and higher education mission. In turn this public policy (and thus the institutional mission) drew its strength from three distinct

southern cultural forces: the honor code, the need for rank and title, and the overall social propensity toward violence.

One may view this critical "prehistory," so influenced by state government, in three distinct periods: 1.) "the arsenal years," tracing institutional links with the Lexington arsenal (from 1816 to 1835); 2.) "the planning and lobbying" years (1835-36), when instrumental men inside and outside government decided to alter the arsenal and create a military school; and 3.) "the establishment years" (1837-39), when VMI existed under state law in one form or another. The last section details key events leading to and surrounding the opening of VMI's gates to the first cadets.

### **The Arsenal Years: 1816 to 1835**

This nineteen year period does not cover the entire life of the Lexington arsenal--just the time before interest in converting the arsenal into a military school arose. The arsenal remained a self-contained legal entity until 1836 when the General Assembly voted to turn it into a military school connected with Washington College (now Washington and Lee) (Acts of the General Assembly, 1836). Next, one must understand some of the historical context that led the Commonwealth of Virginia to construct an arsenal in the first place--an arsenal whose buildings became the first VMI campus and whose military character the Institute inherited.

As early as 1778, the Virginia House of Delegates had toyed with the idea of not only constructing state arsenals designed for the protection of militia armaments, but of combining an arsenal with a military school created for the training of militia. A House committee chaired by Richard Henry Lee (Robert E. Lee's uncle) reported to the general committee of the House on January 23, 1778, that a "Monsieur Loyaute ought to be engaged. . .to search for a

proper place where a general school of instruction in the art of artillery and fortification may be established" (House Journal, 1778 138-39). Of course, under the circumstances, this search for a new military school was perfectly understandable; the Commonwealth was at war with the British crown and desperately required qualified militia officers to guard state weapon caches. Due to a variety of reasons, among them the fact that the commonwealth's governor, Thomas Jefferson, found himself preoccupied with a great many more important issues, the school was never constructed. Nevertheless, the House proposal reveals a desire on the part of the state to create a school somewhat similar to what VMI became 60 years later.

Eventually, though, state government did construct arsenals throughout the commonwealth. Construction began on those in the eastern sections of the state and in Richmond with an appropriation from the General Assembly in 1797 (Senate Journal, 1797 12-13). However, the General Assembly had approved no arsenals for the western counties in Virginia, even those east of the current West Virginia border, such as Rockbridge County (Lexington).

This omission must have seemed unconscionable when the British threatened to sweep down from Canada and into the heart of the Old Dominion during the War of 1812. Again, though, the government took no substantive action during the war itself and waited until 1816 to begin construction on arsenals in the western part of the state. Legislative creation of the arsenal came on February 8, 1816: "Be it therefore enacted that it shall be the duty of the Executive of this Commonwealth. . . to solicit and purchase three proper situations for arsenals, one on the western side of the Allegany and two on the eastern side thereof, above the City of Richmond. . ." (Virginia Code, 1819). Governor Wilson Cary Nicholas wrote an open letter to the citizens of Lexington detailing the specification for an arsenal that would contain "20,000 stand of arms" and a "guard of one officer and twenty men" (Couper, v.I 5).



For the most part the legislature and the governor genuinely hoped to safeguard state armaments in the event of renewed British or Indian hostilities. Louis Rubin notes that Virginians were among the first Americans to recognize the necessity of protecting their western frontiers from a host of potential enemies. Indians still posed a threat to the new American states, especially when European powers such as the British courted them as allies (93). Then, too, there remained the potential for citizen-led revolts against state tax policies. The Virginia governor's powers over the militia extended him the ability to call forth state troops to quell an "insurrection, or such probable prospect thereof. . ." (Virginia Code, 1819).

By November of 1816 Lexington found itself the center of much state government attention (Campbell to Nicholas, Nov. 1816, Executive Papers). The officer appointed to command the arsenal, James Patton, was given the title "superintendent" (Campbell to Nicholas, Nov. 1816 and Calendar X-487 60), a title that the commandant of Virginia Military Institute eventually took as well. The symbolism of using this title is important: it is an organizational term connoting absolute authority imbued from a higher source--in this case the Governor's office--and it sets a definite hierarchical tone. The Lexington arsenal was a governmental entity and its organization reflected deference to state authority. This is an important legacy, one that combined 33 years of momentum by the time VMI's own "superintendent" arrived in Lexington and one that certainly left indelible impressions on the newly forming organizational structure and identity of a young institution of higher education.

We are left with a good deal of archival information about the specific functions and responsibilities of the Lexington arsenal, mostly through records forwarded to the Auditor of Public Accounts in Richmond by arsenal superintendents. We know for example that fourteen men and two women received provisions paid through state funds (APA 1818) and that much

of the equipment and furnishings for the installation came from the state penitentiary (APA 1819). Superintendents sent budgetary summaries to the Auditor's office on a quarterly basis and most expenditures for the early years of the arsenal's existence rarely topped \$250. In general, the number of men and the amount of state funding rose moderately during the period from 1816 to 1835. While these financial records are of little importance by themselves, they nevertheless reveal the arsenal's almost total reliance upon state government funding for its livelihood. Local citizens limited their support for the armory to acting as contractors for state needs. Merchants received reimbursement from the Office of the Governor for supplying basic arsenal needs that were not available from the state prison (APA 1816-1819).

Financial records from the arsenal surely establish a strong link to state authority--a link that continued even after the arsenal became Virginia Military. However, one particular expenditure from the report of Superintendent D.M. Moore (APA 1834), Moore's claimed reimbursement for his personal servant, Jack (whose lack of a surname indicates that he was probably a black slave), symbolizes the arsenal's tie to a state government that supported the southern institution of slavery.

The practice of the state reimbursing the superintendent for slaves represents government's connection to a unique aspect of southern culture and the arsenal's tie to this culture as well. Second, and more importantly, this reimbursement parallels a similar practice that was to occur later at VMI, the purchase of state-owned slaves or "stoop-niggers" to act as support staff at the Institute (Couper, v.I 85). Thus, VMI simply continued a policy previously followed at the Lexington arsenal of having the state reimburse institutional coffers for the purchase of slaves. Both the arsenal and its stepchild, VMI, implemented the dictates of a state government policy whose roots ran deep beneath fields of southern social culture and political ideology. In such a way, Virginia Military possessed a ready-made institutional

identity provided by Virginia state government, tested at the Lexington arsenal, and based on distinct regional beliefs that included the sanction of human bondage.

Of course, in the case of the Lexington arsenal (and to a lesser extent in the case of VMI, too) state policy emanated from the executive branch, often carried in letters addressed to the arsenal superintendent and signed by the governor himself. Legally, the Executive Office of the Governor held complete authority over the state militia, of which the arsenal was one arm: "the Governor of this Commonwealth shall at all times, have power to retain the militia in the service of this State. . ." (Virginia Code, 1819 104). Just like the arsenal guard, who were members of the state militia, VMI cadets eventually became members of the militia, too (Virginia Code 1860 174). To this extent, then, ultimate gubernatorial control over the cadets at VMI is another holdover from the arsenal days and yet another instance of direct state influence in creating an organizational identity.

Interestingly enough, another early VMI tradition also has an arsenal/state government origin. In his 1818 address to the General Assembly, Governor James Preston mentions a state provision "for the enlistment of musicians" to whose music the guard could drill and train (House Journal, 1818-19 5). Virginia Military's establishing statute stipulates that the "superintendent of the institute may enlist musicians for service on [the] post, to be paid out of the annual appropriation heretofore provided" (Virginia Code, 1860 176). Again, the governor's office succeeded in creating an Institute tradition by allowing its continuation long after the demise of the arsenal.

By 1834, the arsenal had changed little from its original organization and mission. The Auditor of Public Accounts continued to register post expenditures and, aside from changes in guard personnel and commanders, costs also differed little from those reported in

the early 1820's. However, if there were few changes inside the arsenal, there were some momentous changes occurring outside its walls. No longer did the arsenal simply protect state weapons stores from the British, the Indians, or angry citizens who might disagree with state tax policies. Instead, the arsenal, indeed, all of the state militia, served primarily as a bulwark against two new dangers to the southern (and Virginian) way of life: slave rebellions and abolitionists.

### **Planning and Lobbying: 1835-36**

#### Forces of Change:

Primarily there were three main cultural undercurrents that helped precipitate the eventual alteration of the Lexington arsenal from armory to military college. These cultural forces--the fear of slave revolts and abolitionists, honor and the need in southern society for rank and title, and the southern propensity toward violence--swayed many political decisions during the 1830's, one of which was the creation of Virginia Military Institute. Moreover, these forces have one link in common: all three helped substantiate the need for increased accountability, strength, and competence in the state militia. This need became the chief building material for the argument to establish VMI.

#### **1. Fear of Slave Revolts and Abolitionists**

In August of 1831, Nat Turner, a slave in Southampton County, Virginia, (some 40 miles due west of Norfolk), led a troop of his fellow slaves on a murderous trek through the county, brutally killing white slave owners, their wives, children, and any other whites they happened to encounter. Citizens of Southampton and neighboring counties quashed the rebellion in equally violent fashion, killing far more blacks than were actually involved in the uprising, hanging Turner and his "co-conspirators" after a show-trial, and making money-pouches from Turner's skin (Sydnor 225-26; Styron 425).

If anything, this horrible event made real one of the worst fears lingering in the recesses of many southern minds: a widespread slave uprising. Secondly, the rebellion prompted new fears among Virginians and their fellow southerners--fears of a secret attempt by abolitionist northerners to encourage new revolts in hopes of breaking slavery and the southern economy (Sydnor 224). The fear of marauding, vengeful slaves coupled with the ever-present paranoia of northern subversion of the southern way of life led to a panic bordering on hysteria (224). Louis Rubin notes that "what made Virginians fearful of rebellion was the suspicion that Nat Turner might be in every family" (113). But Virginians were not alone. As Charles Sydnor writes, "the outbreak in Southhampton County turned the thoughts of men in other parts of the South to the danger of similar disasters" (226). Southern society was a mass of frayed nerves in December 1831.

C. Vann Woodward sums up this time in southern history and its ramification for the future of southern society by noting that "one of the South's tensions sprang from a lack of internal security--the fear of servile insurrection. (Burden 62). In writing about Harper's Ferry, an 1859 incident in Virginia that combined abolitionist fervor with slave revolt, he explains that ". . .the South had been living in a crisis atmosphere for a long time. It was a society in the grip of an insecurity complex. . .(Burden 62). Woodward also describes the ironic emergence of the several antislavery societies in the South during the 1820's and the virtual eradication of these groups in the wake of Nat Turner (198-99). Reactionism ruled the day.

The "insecurity" of which Woodward writes was a main factor in causing the Virginia legislature to react quickly upon reconvening in Richmond on January 11 of 1832 (only two months after Turner's execution). A lengthy debate on the necessity of eradicating slavery in the commonwealth, perhaps the only one of its kind and certainly the only one of its degree

in southern antebellum history, lasted for some two weeks (Sydnor 227). Amazingly, the House of Delegates actually voted on abolishing slavery in Virginia and the bill lost by a fairly close margin, 73 to 58. (House Journal 1831-32 42).

The very fact a vote occurred at all in the state where slavery first began reveals the guilt and terror gnawing at antebellum Virginia society. If anything, Virginia in the 1830's began to close itself off from outside influences that it viewed as dangerous to the southern way of life. This isolationism found public expression through a newly vehement sectionalism (Sydnor 222) and concomitant interests in stronger state rights and military power. Applied to government, the commingled fear of slave revolts born from northern insurgency became a leading reason for refocusing state government attention on the state militia and on the military in southern society as a whole (Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence 170). Calls for creating a state military college for training militia officers--men well-trained to handle domestic emergencies such as the Nat Turner Rebellion--would become commonplace in a few years and eventually play an integral part in reinvigorating the militia. Several letters to the editor of the Lexington Gazette in 1835 and 1836 make clear that such training could be achieved at the Lexington arsenal if the state modified it into a military school (see subsection on "Cives" later in this chapter).

## 2. Honor and the Need for Rank and Title

If the newly amplified fears of a violent decay in the South's "peculiar institution" (slavery) set the stage for change in Virginia government, the proponents of another, older concept played on these fears and saw institutional changes (such as the impending creation of a state military school) as a way of perpetuating the longstanding southern social code rooted in honor.

Honor is sometimes viewed as synonymous with the American South and indeed the code's "patron saint," Robert E. Lee, was a native Virginian. Moreover, in the commonwealth, honor meant an appreciation and a profound respect for one's home state. Regarding Lee, Wyatt-Brown writes in Honor and Violence in the Old South that "the Old Dominion was not an abstraction in Lee's mind. Inextricably, it was bound up with the life and heritage of the Lees. . ." (146). In other words, Lee's home state "was bound up" with his personal identity--an identity linked to family and place. For the white male living in Virginia in the 1830's, living an honorable life--"doing the right thing"--required respect for this heritage and for the state that fostered it, whether your name was Lee or not. Naturally, southern institutions seized upon this concept, too.

On a another level, honor was the code by which southern white males lived their lives in a society that had only recently carved itself out of the North American wilderness (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor 368). A certain hierarchy born from this honor code and openly manifested by distinctions of military rank and civilian title dictated the behavior and governed the lives of these men. Rank and/or title gave the white male a term of respect attached to his name; it distinguished him from the more common set of his brethren and it provided him with a certain social prestige in the company of his peers. However, there were few ways of gaining such titles. Prior to VMI, colleges could not provide title save in the few instance where men actually became doctors, lawyers, or clergymen. Political office could provide such rank, but those offices (like today) were hard to achieve and usually reserved for the influential few. The military provided the third choice. The United States Army and Navy certainly doled out plenty of titles, but U.S. military outposts were scant in number in the rural South. Given these barriers, the logical avenue for achieving rank became the state militia (Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence 146, 192).

In this context, designation of officer's rank in the militia denoted status in southern society. Wyatt-Brown writes that the military "occupation was held up to popular acclaim because it was the most efficacious means of exhibiting and defending personal, family, regional, and national honor" (Southern Honor 191). The creation of a military school whose students and faculty received militia rank provided a relatively easy route for gaining such status, especially for those young men who had not the money for buying commissions in the militia.

But no matter the means by which rank was achieved, the process included an "indoctrination" into the honor code—the critical element of social control in the antebellum South. Honor conferred meaning on southern society and on the patriarchs who held power in that society; to gain acceptance in their world meant accepting their belief system (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor 368). And "for the small but influential number [of young males] who attended college, honor was an unannounced part of the curriculum. . ." (167). There is little wonder, then, that the University of Virginia, the College of William and Mary, and Hampden-Sydney College, all ran their campuses by the honor code. Emerging in this company, Virginia Military quickly conformed to affirmed social standards by using the honor system and promised the added benefit of conferring social rank on its matriculants.

### 3. Violence

Plainly stated, the chief reason southern males abided by the honor code in southern society stemmed from the need to check a cultural propensity toward violence. W.J. Cash based much of his work, The Mind of the South, on the belief that the antebellum South was a frontier region where violence abounded and where men lived by their own interpretations of an uncoded honor system (a form of natural law, you might say) (4). The concept of honor "served wonderfully for a balance wheel in the Southern social world and so as a barrier against the development of bitterness," Cash writes(42). Moreover, this honor system could



also lead to violence in certain acceptable situations: the "concept of honor, of something inviolable and precious in the ego, to be protected against stain at every cost, and imposing definite standards of conduct drifted down to [all southern men]" (75-6). The Lexington arsenal and its stepchild, VMI, grew to maturity in such an atmosphere.

This mix of violence and honor found its ultimate expression in the military tradition still so strong in the South today. And, naturally, the state militia provided the easiest path for this expression: "how much easier it was to obtain repute for warrior spirit and the honors of rank through the militia, which could be combined with planting and the other traditional professions" (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor 192). With this combination of factors, the progression from a violent culture to the need for an honor system to the creation of a state military college was a logical one. Creating a Virginia Military Institute became an equally logical step in appeasing the southern bent towards violence through a honor-bound curriculum that promised social title.

### "Cives"

Because of the cultural and political forces at work in the Virginia of the mid 1830's, the creation of a state military school may have been in the minds of many influential men in the commonwealth. However, one group in particular took their case for such a school directly to the people of their community and eventually to the state house. The Franklin Society of Lexington Virginia, a debating club comprised of the leading citizens of Lexington, chose one of its members, young John Thomas Lewis Preston, to write editorial articles to the Lexington Gazette newspaper advocating the creation of a military college in Lexington (Couper, v.I 17). Preston was the wealthy, 24 year-old son of a state legislator, Thomas Lewis Preston, and held the rank of colonel in the state militia (Cunningham 49). Under the pen-name of "Cives" (Latin for "citizen"), Preston wrote a series of frontpage articles in the Gazette

that eloquently spelled out the benefits and virtues of establishing a military college in Lexington. His claims were obviously intent on convincing not only the citizens of Lexington (whose support the Society knew was critical) but state officials as well.

The initial "Cives" article appeared in the August 28, 1835, edition of the Gazette. In it, Preston proclaims that in a democracy, "no appropriation of the public revenue will be permitted, which will not be again returned to the people, in the shape of benefits produced by it" (1). He goes on to assert that the "benefits derived, shall be as great as possible" (1). In this early section of the letter, Preston appeals to the citizen's sense of the social contract that exists between government and citizens in a democratic state. He implies that public monies must fund public services and that the money spent on an arsenal could be better used by spending it on a military school. Preston then clearly states the purpose of his article: to open a public debate on "whether it would be practicable as to organize the Lexington Arsenal that it shall preserve its present character and uses as a military establishment and at the same time, a Literary Institution for the education of youth" (1). By retaining the "present character" of the arsenal, Preston paved the way for the new school to carry forward some of the traditions and practices already in place at the arsenal. Also, this phrase makes apparent that the school is to have a decidedly public character.

And, in fact, the use of state funds provides the source for much of Preston's arguments in the letter. He links the idea of the new school directly with state financial support writing that if "we [are] able to show, the objects of the State will be effectually secured, certainly we may expect that the Legislature will favorably regard the wishes of the community. . ." (1). It becomes obvious that the Franklin Society had never seriously entertained ideas of funding a private college (at least no record exists to indicate this) and Preston's eagerness to convince state government of the soundness of changing the arsenal seems to reinforce this hypothesis.

He writes that "we would have the whole Guard or school under military discipline, not only to serve the object of the state establishing this military post, but otherwise that industry, regularity and health might be promulgated" (emphasis added) (1). Note that Preston fully intended from the beginning to have the school double as the arsenal "Guard" and that he had hopes of establishing an institution specifically aimed at serving the state.

Preston goes on to write about the curriculum for the new college, calling it "sufficiently liberal, to enable a young man. . . to enter upon the study of any of the learned professions" (1). Washington College (now Washington and Lee) would teach much of the traditional college curriculum; the "military art" would be taught at the new campus occupying the current Lexington arsenal. The school would emphasize applied learning--military training and the advantages it could bring to "State, to the community, and to the cause of liberty" (1). Certainly that was the impression Preston hoped to leave with important powers in Richmond. Thus, from the inception of the VMI idea, the key lay in convincing state government of the school's usefulness. Preston and his proteges would strive to make sure that the "Legislature" supported their proposal and would sacrifice institutional autonomy in order to gain critical financial support. This is not to say that Preston and the Franklin Society were simply paying lipservice to state needs. Indeed, there is little reason to doubt that these men were sincere about bettering their town, region, and state. They admit "no political, nor party, nor personal feelings induced [our] discussion" about creating a military school and there is little or no evidence to doubt this statement.

The other "Cives" letters focus on various issues raised in the first letter with a common theme of state involvement running through all. For example, "Cives" begins the September 4, 1835, letter "Let us see how this would affect the interests of the State and of the community. . ." (1). Importantly, Preston recognizes the real needs of state government:

a well-trained militia. He writes in the same letter that "the militia system would be gradually improved and invigorated by the accession of qualified officers. . ." (1). And he sums up the inherent state benefit in the military school project by declaring that "the object of the State in founding and keeping the Arsenal. . . would be as well, and we think better, effected than at present. . ." (1). Again, the Franklin Society takes great pains to assure the state that Richmond's interests in the project are paramount. The "objects of the State" will dictate the mission and operation of the new school just as they governed the mission and operation of the arsenal. In addition, the government will gain from the modification by integrating school graduates into the state militia, thus propelling its own aims even further than it could by retaining the arsenal in its current form.

Convincing the townspeople of Lexington seems to have been a bit easier since Preston spends less time on this aspect of the project than on convincing state officials. Evidently, Lexingtonians were not overly enamored with the soldiers at the arsenal. Preston concedes that "it need not be said that the soldiery of the Arsenal is the most unpleasant part of our population" (1). Given this sentiment, replacing common military characters with well-disciplined young men from good families probably seemed a decent trade-off to most townsfolk.

The Lexington Gazette published the third and final "Cives" letter on September 11, 1835. Again, Preston wrote of the many services that the new school could provide to the commonwealth, including a better disciplined garrison with which to protect the armaments stored in Lexington. He reiterated the cost effectiveness of altering the arsenal by reminding his readers that the students could serve as the guard for the arsenal while enrolled for study and remain in the militia after graduation as officers (2). This letter also concludes with the now famous words now inscribed on the parapet at VMI:

"the healthful and pleasant abode of a crowd of honorable youths pressing up the hill of science, with noble emulation, a gratifying spectacle, an honor to our country and our state, objects of honest pride to their instructors, and fair specimens of citizen-soldiers, attached to their native state, proud of her fame, and ready in every time of deepest peril to vindicate her honor or defend her rights" (2).

In these words, we see the full representation of VMI's early mission and its strong ties to Virginia, Virginia government, and the southern ideals for which these entities stood. Cives sums up the basis for the antebellum identity of Virginia Military long before his school had a name: honor, the concept of the "citizen-soldier," that civilian with the military title so coveted in southern society, and the willingness to fight for what honor holds sacred, especially the "native State." Scarcely 25 years later, these words lost their abstraction; they became reality in the form of cadet lives lost on the battlefield at New Market and they formed the historical chain that linked the post-war VMI with its antebellum ancestor.

Preston submitted a fourth letter, unsigned, that was printed in the Gazette on January 8, 1836. In actuality, this letter was a reprint of a letter that Preston distributed to every desk of every House of Delegates member at the beginning of the second session of the 1835-36 legislative session. With this letter, he also submitted his plan for a curriculum and for the general make-up of the school that he had included in the September 4, 1835, "Cives" article (Couper, v. I 21). Preston writes in the January 8 letter to the editor that the new school "will afford a reasonable protection to the Public Arms" and that the annual cost of the school "would not exceed \$900" (Letter to the Editor, 2).

Preston closes this letter to the General Assembly by playing on their fears of falling behind the North in their ability to train effective military leaders and to protect the citizens that elected them. He boldly writes that by creating the military school "you will no longer permit our beloved State to remain behind the very foremost of her sister States. . .[Y]ou will by the establishment of the proposed institution, illustrate the high character of this proud Old

Dominion. . .for patriotism, liberty, and humanity" (2). With these words, Preston elicits action from the legislature by preying on their fears for maintaining state autonomy or "liberty." And, he tells the Assembly that a military school ensures adequately trained officers for protecting vital state interests from the "foremost sister States"--those in the North.

#### Action by the Legislature

Preston and the Franklin Society were effective lobbyists; on March 22, 1836, the Senate passed a House resolution for "re-organizing the Lexington arsenal, and establishing a military school in connexion with Washington College" (Acts, 1836). The preamble to the act makes deference to the fact that the new school will perform most of the same duties as the current arsenal: "the custody of the public arms deposited at that place will be rendered equally secure as under the present organization, without imposing any additional burdens upon the commonwealth" (Acts, 1836). In something of a surprise move, the Assembly also directs Washington college (a private institution) to allocate some of its money donated by the Cincinnati society (a private organization) for "endowment of a military professorship in said college" (Acts, 1836).

The act then goes on to disband the arsenal and to order the appointment of "four fit and suitable citizens of this state, who. . .shall constitute" a Board of Visitors. The act also enumerates the powers of this "quorum," giving them the responsibilities of annually inspecting the arsenal, appointing a treasurer, making reports to the governor, and appointing "one or more professors, qualified to give to young men instruction in the various branches of military science" (Acts, 1836). The men were to be paid by and to act as surrogates for state officials.

Provision for admissions to the school is also established, distinguishing the new school from private schools in its inability to control its own admissions process. The act states that

"the senator and delegation in the general assembly from each senatorial district in the state. . .shall be regarded as the organs through whom application for admission into said school shall be made. . ." (13). With this clause, the state assures itself of having a great deal of power in shaping the student body at the school. Influential men in the state legislature will help decide who attends the new school. Moreover, the act actually names the new student body at the school the "Cadet corps of Virginia," thus leaving little doubt as to whom they owe allegiance and also distinguishing them from students at other schools.

And, finally, the assembly legally binds the school to Washington College, dictating that it "shall be regarded and taken as a part and branch of Washington College" (13). Obviously, the legislators had never heard of (or did not care about) the Dartmouth College case, which established that state governments essentially had little power over private colleges (Rudolph 210). As we shall see in the next section, the Washington College trustees were better acquainted with the concepts discussed in the case than were their colleagues in Richmond!

Despite some language prompting eventual conflict on several fronts, the act represented a first major step towards the creation of VMI (although it never actually gives a name to the new school). In fact, much of the 1836 act remained intact in the 1839 law establishing Virginia Military. Moreover, the law represents state government's belief that it has ultimate control over education in the commonwealth--whether private or public--and that it holds purview at public schools over the most sacred of academic freedoms: faculty selection and admissions. At this embryonic stage, the new military school seems less a "part and branch of Washington College" than of state government.

#### **Establishment of Virginia Military Institute: 1837-39**

"Connexion" and "Collision" with Washington College

Up to now, the creation of military school from what had been a state arsenal had proven a relatively easy process for the astute founders from Lexington. Molding this new school into an institution with a cohesive identity of some kind would take much longer and would not really come until after the Civil War. However, there were changes to the school shortly after its legal birth that began to set the stages for making the school something more than just a "connexion" with Washington College.

The governor watched his new school closely. The legislature had only recently given him the ability to appoint board members (House Journal 1838, 313) thus tying the school even closer to the executive branch and to state military interests. Accordingly, Campbell himself hand wrote most of the correspondence regarding the institution (Executive Communications 1837) and was careful to appoint men loyal to the state military establishment and to state government as a whole to act as his agents in Lexington.

Appointing the first Board of Visitors helped to distinguish the new institution from its neighbor in Lexington and gave the school a formal system of leadership. The first executive order concerning the school came from Governor David Campbell on March 22, 1837, and instructed the Secretary of the Commonwealth, William H. Richardson, to notify the Adjutant General of the State Militia, Bernard Peyton, of his choices for the Board of Visitors. It also established the date of the Board's first meeting as August 7, 1837 (Executive Communications 1837). A letter from Richardson to Peyton dated May 30, 1837, names the new members: Claudius Crozet, General William Lignon, General George Rust, and General Peter C. Johnson (Executive Communications 1837). Peyton himself was to act as an ex officio member. Three of the men were high ranking state militia members and thus closely connected with the Executive Office of the Governor. The fourth, Claudius Crozet, was the



Principal Engineer for the Commonwealth of Virginia (House Journal, 1839 doc. no. 43), a graduate of the famed Ecole Polytechnique in Paris (the military school upon which West Point was modeled), and a former French army officer under Napoleon (Couper, Crozet 2). Crozet would become member of a triumvirate that would help to shape and form VMI in its early years (the other two men being J.T.L. Preston and Francis Smith, the first Superintendent). Together, these four men represented the strong power of the state over the new military school and acted as surrogate parents of the school in the absence of the governor and legislature.

As directed, the board met on August 7 in Lexington and immediately elected Crozet as their first president (Couper, Crozet 94). They then drafted a letter to the Board of Trustees of Washington College requesting "the proceeds of the Cincinnati fund" to endow a military professorship; they hoped for a reply "as at early a moment as may be convenient" (House Journal 1838, Doc. 1 22).

And the trustees at Washington College were indeed eager to reply--in the negative. In a letter dated August 9, 1837, the Chairman of the Trustees responds to the military school board by first telling them that the Cincinnati funds are tied up in court and will likely never be available and by then reminding them (and thus the governor) that the trustees "disclaim all right on the part of the legislature to establish for them such or any other connexion without their consent" (House Journal 1838, Doc.1 22). The trustees consent to cadet admissions into academic classes at Washington, but only if Washington students are granted admission into military training classes at the arsenal school (22). In these ways, the trustees clearly assert their institutional autonomy. While the arsenal may be a state entity, their college most certainly is not. As an independent institution, Washington guarded its autonomy ferociously and would continue to do so. This initial denial to the military school board set the

precedent for a long series of VMI/Washington (and Lee) disputes that continue even today (the two colleges rarely play each other in college sports because of violent student clashes).

Obviously worried by this turn of events, the military school Board of Visitors sent a letter to the governor on the same day detailing their problems with the college (House Journal 1838, Doc. 1 21). The members lament the fact that they can no longer count on money from the college to endow their professorship and that they must rely solely on state funds with which to hire a teacher. They then catalogue the many facilities improvements that the arsenal will require before students could inhabit it: larger rooms for housing the guard and "a steward's house and kitchen, and a mess hall are also necessary" (21). Of course, they note, they have no funds for such construction. More importantly though, the board truly felt that the brewing rivalry with Washington College "might produce a collision between the two institutions, and thereby impair, at least, perhaps destroy, the utility of both" (21). They go on to add that "the legislative body alone can obviate the difficulties" (21) and that until the assembly acts, "we feel ourselves compelled. . .to suspend for a while the organization of the military school" (21). With this admission, proponents of the new school must have realized that they had encountered two new obstructions to their dream of a military college: the unfriendliness of the existing higher education community and the well-documented slowness of the state legislative process.

#### Removing Obstructions: Actions of the General Assembly

Perhaps the first positive sign that the new military school was receiving some renewed state attention came as early as October of 1837 when the name "Virginia Military Institute" first appears in documentation for the Auditor of Public Accounts (APA, Warrants, 1837). By admitting that the institution it had so recently created actually had a name, the state

signalled that it was willing to view the school as a distinct entity and not just an arm of Washington College.

Moreover, the name was symbolic of the institution's unique mission and of its close link with state government. In a speech written by J.T.L. Preston at the Semicentennial Celebration of VMI's founding in 1889, Preston revealed that Delegate James McDowell (who would become Governor McDowell) asked him to provide a name for the military school. Preston complied, providing the name "Virginia Military Institute: "Virginia--as a State institution, neither sectional nor denominational. Military--indicating its characteristic feature. Institute--as something different from either college or university" (Couper, v. iv 20). Once again, at the prompting of the state legislature, Preston's words helped provide the nucleus of an identity for the Institute and helped shape a mission for the school in the minds of Assembly members. The name leaves no doubt of the loyalty placed in state government by the father of the institution. Neither does it connote any mission other than an applied, military one--one that can serve the community and the state. With this title and the words that explain it, Preston made clear to the legislature that he intended Virginia Military to provide loyal service to the state. In return for this compromise of academic freedom, he again asked for state financial support. The government complied--albeit with some delay.

In actuality, Governor David Campbell rekindled legislative debate over VMI funding by stating in his annual January address to the General Assembly that "the state would derive great benefit from the permanent establishment of a military school. . . [T]he appropriation proposed by the visitors for erecting additional buildings ought to be made" (House Journal 1838 13). On January 5, 1838, only four days after Governor Campbell's speech, Delegate McDowell, who had earlier petitioned Preston for the name of the school, motioned that "so much of the governor's message as relates to the execution of the law re-organizing the arsenal

at Lexington. . .be referred to the committee for schools and colleges and that said committee be instructed to report on the whole subject by bill or otherwise" (House Journal 1838 22). McDowell, a member of the appointed committee, presented on February 24, 1838, "a bill amending and reducing into one the several acts concerning the reorganization of the Lexington arsenal. . ." (House Journal 1838 139). VMI now had a strong ally within the House as well as the support of the governor.

Still, the Assembly took no action for the rest of the first session, waiting until the 1839 session to move the VMI bill from the committee on schools and colleges to the committee on militia (House Journal 1839 33). Why this occurred is uncertain, although one might infer from the relatively short time that the bill took to pass through the legislature after its removal from the schools and colleges committee that Delegate McDowell felt the militia committee more favorable to its passage. Following this motion, the House read, reread, tabled, and finally voted upon the "engrossed" bill as presented by Delegate Dorman on March 6, 1839 (House Journal 96, 123, 136, 143, 150, 179). The bill passed 83 to 24 and was then sent to the Senate (179).

With several minor amendments, the Senate passed the bill on March 28, 1839, and returned the bill to the House for its concurrence (Senate Journal 1839 169). The House concurred with the changes, thus formally passing the act establishing Virginia Military Institute on March 29, 1839. With this act, VMI became the second state college in Virginia (the University of Virginia was the first), the first state military college in the country, and the second military college in the United States (West Point was the only military institution in existence prior to VMI).

#### The Establishing Act

Entitled "An ACT amending and reducing into one the several acts concerning re-organization of the Lexington arsenal and the establishment therewith of a military school at Washington College," the original law creating VMI was fairly terse. The legislature appropriated \$6000 for "establishment and support" of the school "which shall be called "Virginia Military Institute" (Acts, 1839). The law also called for the appointment by the governor of nine board of visitors, who, with the adjutant general would constitute the governing body of the school. The new board was then to inspect the arms at the arsenal and report back to the governor on their condition. This charge represents well the dual mission of educational institution and arsenal guard that VMI was to serve (Acts, 1839).

The Assembly spent a great deal of time detailing the admission of students to the new school. The board is empowered by the governor to admit "as state cadets free of charge for board and tuition. . .not less than thirty-two young men, who shall not be less than sixteen nor more than twenty-five years of age" (Acts, 1839). Importantly, in a move that clearly shows the Institute's close relationship with the legislature, the Assembly mandated that the board must take one cadet "from each senatorial district offering one" (18). As a state-controlled school, and thus a representative of state government power, VMI must take care not to alienate its constituents. Doing so could precipitate unnecessary political problems for itself and for the legislators that fund it.

The legislators leave little doubt about the nature of the Institute's public service orientation. These cadets are to serve the state as students, as "citizen-soldiers." "The students at the school thus admitted shall be formed into a military corps, and shall constitute the public guard of the arsenal. . ." (Acts, 1839). Students are also to serve as soldiers for safeguarding state property and to represent the military power of the state in fulfilling this charge. The law also requires cadets to remain in their "term of service" at the Institute for

no less than two but no more than five years. Unlike ordinary college students, the cadets could not simply drop out of school whenever they felt compelled to do so.

No provision is made for the direct commission of graduates into the state militia, but the understanding that graduation would carry with it the title of "lieutenant" or even "captain" and that attendance at the school was an entre to commission in the militia was a prevalent one (Preston). The indelible imprint of the state militia was also apparent in the provision allowing commissioned officers to receive training at the Institute for not over ten months (Acts, 1839).

And, finally, the legislature learned a valuable lesson regarding college autonomy: it no longer required Washington College to cooperate with VMI but, rather, provided for an "auxiliary connexion" by which mutual enrollment could occur between the two schools (Acts, 1839). There is no mention of a common funding source for the two colleges.

### Convocation

At this point, all that remained was to determine when to open the Institute, what precisely to teach to the first matriculants, and whom to chose as the principal professor. On the recommendation of Bernard Peyton, Adjutant General, J.T.L. Preston (whom the governor had appointed as one of the additional five Board members) immediately wrote to Hampden-Sydney mathematics professor, Francis Henney Smith, about becoming the Institute's first "commandant" (Preston to Smith, May 17, 1839, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1839). Preston explained to Smith that the commandant, who would also double as principal professor, "must be capable of giving instruction in the Military Art, and also in Mathematics" (Preston to Smith, May 17, 1839). He also detailed the admissions policies and provided an overview of what the curriculum might comprise.

Due to the slow nature of the post in those days, Crozet naturally could not respond before the first official VMI Board meeting, May 30, 1839. At that meeting Crozet was once again elected as President of the Board (this time, of the Virginia Military Board) (Lexington Gazette June 1, 1839, 5). The Board installed the Institute treasurer, surgeon, and clerk and decided to admit twelve "irregular" cadets--those, who, unlike the state cadets, would pay the full cost of tuition (Board of Visitors Minutes, May 30, 1839). The curriculum was to include instruction in mathematics and French; the military instructor at the Institute was to provide instruction for the Washington College students as well. Crozet then set about putting together an elaborate, detailed set of 244 regulations that would govern the new school. These regulations governed virtually every aspect of cadet life, from cuff size to morning breakfast fare. They laid down, in essence, the rules of an honorable life for the cadets. At Crozet's suggestion, the Board modeled the code on West Point and Ecole Polytechnique regulations. Of particular interest are the regulations that symbolize the Institute's direct relationship with the government, such as the precise requirement that the buttons on each cadet "coatee" must be "impressed with the arms of the State of Virginia" (Board of Visitors Minutes, May 30, 1839). After adopting these regulations, the Board adjourned on June 8, setting September 10, 1839, as the date of their next meeting (Board of Visitors Minutes, May 30, 1839). (For more information on the first VMI Regulations, also see Chapter 3).

In the interim, Francis Smith agreed to serve as the first commandant of the Institute (Smith to Preston, July 1, 1839; Lexington Gazette July 13, 1839, 5), advising the Board that he would leave for Lexington after completing his term at Hampden-Sydney on September 25. Also in July, the state Auditor of Public Accounts in Richmond, received checks of \$568 and \$432 dated July 6 payable to construction contractors John Jordan and James Alexander, respectively. Crozet reported to Governor David Campbell on November 21, 1839, that "contracts were entered into with Col. John Jordan for the carpentry and James Alexander for

the brickwork of a dwelling house for the principal professor and for raising the present barracks one story higher, the whole to cost \$4500" (BOV Report, House Journal 1839, Doc.1, 20). Obviously, the July 6 checks were installments on the total.

The Auditor also records a draft made by Hugh Barclay, first treasurer of the Institute, on state funds:

"The treasurer of the Commonwealth of Virginia, will pay in to the Bank of Virginia, to the credit of Hugh Barclay, treasurer of the Virginia Military Institute out of the fund appropriated by the Legislature to said Institute, the sum of Fifteen Hundred Dollars, by order of the Board of Visitors, for the purposes of purchasing Books, Furniture, and other expenses, necessary to put the Institute into operation" (APA 1839).

Importantly, among the new Board Members who signed this document along with the treasurer, is James McDowell, the state legislator (and soon governor) who had been instrumental in steering VMI's ratification through the House. Along with the principal state engineer (Crozet), several state militia officers, the state adjutant general (Peyton), and the son of a state legislator (Preston), VMI's chief leadership body could now boast a state legislator. The state's interests were indeed well represented.

The Board met again briefly on September 10, 1839, and among their actions, they admitted thirteen state cadets and twenty additional "irregular cadets," and set the date of the Institute's opening as November 11 (Couper, v. I 55). Claudius Crozet drafted a letter to Francis Smith requesting him to obtain "muskets and equipments. . .from the U.S. Government free of charge" while on a visit to West Point. Also, Crozet asks him to inquire with the State Librarian in Richmond about the state's acquisition of books for the upcoming academic year--40 copies each of three French mathematics books and four French language texts (Crozet to Smith, Sept. 12, 1839, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1839). The influences of the Ecole Polytechnique as well as those of West Point are undeniable, both



owing to Crozet's affiliation with each institution. But more important for purposes here is further evidence of VMI's reliance upon the state for every dollar of its operating budget, even down to the last textbook. The school could count on few if any private funds (and certainly none from Washington College) for its initial year of operation.

On the date of its opening, November 11, 1839, Commandant Smith (he was yet to be called "superintendent") issued the first order given at the Institute, which named and gave rank to ten of the new cadets and ordered all cadets to obtain textbooks from Hugh Barclay, the Institute's treasurer. (Order No. 1, Superintendents Orders, 1839). State Adjutant General Bernard Peyton, an ex officio member of the VMI Board of Visitors, represented the governor's office in officially taking charge of the Lexington arsenal grounds from its last superintendent. "Adjutant General Peyton raised the flag of Virginia over the wall of the Virginia Military Institute, to signalize (sic) the exclusive proprietorship of Virginia in the institution" (Board of Visitors Report in House Journal 1839, Doc. 1, 20). With this symbolic takeover of the arsenal, VMI's emergence as a new state entity becomes complete, thus assuring state government a critical role in shaping the new school's mission and identity.

As Crozet wrote to the Governor on November 21 in his Board of Visitors Report, "the young men who relieved the former [arsenal] guard took their post with cheerfulness; and although in the midst of a snow storm, performed their new duties with alacrity. . ." (Board of Visitors report, 1839). The Board President also named the first 28 young men (20 state cadets and 8 full-paying cadets) and their home counties. All were Virginians. The buildings contracted for in July were yet to be finished but were close enough to completion to allow for operation. Crozet takes this opportunity to appeal to Campbell for a steward's house, piped water, fencing, out buildings, ground levelling, and, in keeping with arsenal practice, "two

servants" (slaves). If he were to receive all these requests, Crozet estimates the total capital outlay for the 1839-40 academic year to approach \$10,200 (Board of Visitors Report, 1839).

Crozet closes his report by reaffirming the Institute's commitment to state service:

"Here will be a school patronized by the state, and the essential principle of which will be a sense of honour and duty. . .To the state it will procure every year a number of talented young men, engineers and soldiers, ready to serve her usefully in case of need, and it will promote and diffuse knowledge of military science more effectually than any militia law could do" (21).

## Conclusion

One of those ten cadets that received rank from Francis Smith on the first day of the Institute's operation was Fifth Corporal, Valentine C. Saunders of Loudoun County, Virginia (Board of Visitors Report in House Journal 1839 Doc. 1, 19; Order No. 1, Superintendent's Orders, 1839). In a letter to his mother and father in Leesburg dated November 23, 1839, Cadet Saunders no doubt sums up well the feelings of most of that first entering class: "I am among an excellent set of fellows. There appears to exist in the breast of every Virginian a homogenous feeling that prompts them to treat each other like brothers, and adapts them to each other's company" (Cadet Letters, Saunders, Nov. 23, 1839). Indeed, in large part, VMI's mission was to instill an honorable loyalty to the Old Dominion and to introduce cadets to the principles of honor and discipline required of all southern white males.

Together, Cadet Saunder's letter and Crozet's patriotic fealty to Virginia government in his Board Report of November 21, help to reveal an emerging institutional mission that furthered state public policies based on southern cultural expectations and traditions. How, precisely, the Institute would apply this emerging mission to its own set of institutional needs was yet to be seen at the time Crozet and Saunders were writing.

Clark theorizes that in the founding of distinctive, new colleges, "the central ideas and the defining theme tend most toward the qualities of an untouchable saga precisely in the minds of the committed, external beholders" (252). If that is case, state officials, as the "external beholders" of VMI's founding, had most certainly started to "define the qualities of an untouchable saga." And, of similar importance in the maturation of this saga, institutional personnel from Crozet down to young Cadet Saunders already understood these initial "qualities" well, even on that first snowy afternoon in 1839.

### CHAPTER THREE: IMPLEMENTING MISSION--1840 TO 1860

To borrow a metaphor from John Thelin, the development of a college's history is something akin to the "cultivation of ivy." (Cultivation of Ivy). Colleges shape and mold their curricula, students, and faculty to ensure that the living ivy--institutional identity--clings tightly to the walls of an ever-evolving academic tradition. In the case of Virginia Military, several of those walls and the initial seeding of ivy were provided by the state of Virginia in 1816 with the establishment of the Lexington Arsenal. State government also provided a number of the bricks and much of the mortar for creating additional walls, but left the construction up to the founders and the early administration of VMI. This chapter strives to detail precisely how the Institute shaped these new walls into new buildings and began cultivating its own ivy. The result was a steadfast mission that guided the college's early growth and led towards a full-fledged saga.

Moreover, VMI may have been fortifying its mission, strengthening it and testing its boundaries, but it was also fortifying the actual defenses of the Commonwealth of Virginia and of the South at the same time. One runs across several instances where Francis Smith, VMI's first superintendent, or other influential alumni and friends, enumerate the assets VMI brings to the military and civil security of the commonwealth and to the region. VMI's fortifications are both figurative and literal. The buildings constructed at VMI from 1840 to 1860 helped give the Institute its own characteristic environment and helped express the mission it was trying so desperately to fulfill. At the same time, these buildings and the curriculum that developed within their walls, became the proving ground for much of the Confederacy's

military leadership and the keep for an additional source of manpower usable during state emergencies (such as John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859). The impinging slavery issue and accompanying southern sectionalism and nationalism rampant during this time affected the Institute in momentous ways and are thus intrinsically linked with the VMI narrative.

At this point, the concept of institutional saga as it relates to Virginia Military bears some review. Primarily, what one notices in sifting through the thousands of documents pertaining to the Institute from 1840 to 1860 is the overall preoccupation with fulfilling mission and pleasing state officials. Given the strength of VMI's saga later in the 19th century and certainly today, this development is not really surprising. As Burton Clark notes in The Distinctive College, the mission of a college or university is the manifestation of an ideology (254)--here, a growing relationship with things southern and Virginian. In turn, "the mission is simply purpose, something men in the organization hold before themselves. But the mission tested and successfully embodied through the work of a number of years. . . becomes a saga. . ." (235). In the present case, we can characterize VMI between 1840 and 1860 as "testing and successfully embodying" its mission on the road to a more distant saga.

### **Hypothesis**

As the primary focus of the academic staff between 1840 and 1860, the process of fulfilling institutional mission pervaded virtually every aspect of campus life: the curriculum, student life, external relations (both with the government and with the community), and campus architecture and facilities. Furthermore, Virginia Military's diligent attempts to fulfill a mission primarily established for it by leaders within or sympathetic to state government, ensured that the institution remained closely linked to Virginia government, Virginia culture, and the pervasive society of the Old South. In this way, VMI fortified the

foundations of a saga dependent on Virginia culture and the culture of the Old South. It also represented a segment of the real fortifications that guarded these cultures on the eve of the Civil War.

### **Organization**

This chapter differs in its organization from Chapters One and Two and will use a format followed in Chapters Four and Five as well. Section one recounts some historical context through a narrative overview of the years 1840 to 1860 and particularly emphasizes events in the American South and Virginia. This section serves to provide the reader with an historical understanding of the period, hopefully providing perspective on events, people, and places involved with VMI. It is also designed to eliminate the need for redundant historical narrative within each topical section in the chapter, since each remaining section covers the same twenty-year period.

The five topical sections that comprise the bulk of the chapter provide a comprehensive view of the Institute during this period and relate specifically to the development of institutional saga: Government Relations, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Community Relations, and Architecture and Facilities. Given the nature of Virginia Military's attempts to please the state, the first section, State Government Relations, is most critical for understanding VMI's developing character during these years. Each section progresses chronologically through the period.

### **Historical Context**

Virginia Military's emergence on the higher education landscape came during a time of social and political upheaval within the United States. Page Smith aptly characterized the period between 1840 and 1860 as a time when the "nation came of age" (2). America was

gaining awareness, slowly but steadily, of its identity as a wholly new type of country with a distinctive set of principles, ideals, and problems. And yet simmering beneath the American psyche throughout this period was the inescapable, ancient issue of slavery.

In Virginia, slavery had been one of many reasons that prompted state government to create a new military school from the Lexington Arsenal (see Chapter 2). Between 1840 and 1860, though, it became **the** issue that was to galvanize southern sectionalism into southern nationalism (Craven 7) and that was to influence greatly VMI's attempts to fulfill its mission. As the government in Richmond became more and more obsessed with either safeguarding or sidestepping the South's "peculiar institution," VMI, in trying to please state leaders, found itself becoming more and more entangled with the issue. This is not to say that the Institute became a mere instrument for protecting the institution of slavery. Instead, it simply tried to support state policies that in turn supported a southern political agenda based on retaining a slave economy.

Cataloguing the chief historical events between 1840 and 1860, we begin to see that political events were indeed shaping VMI's curriculum, its student body, its faculty--in short, the means to which it fulfilled its mission. In the long run, these events were to have the most dramatic of effects on the school: they led to a civil war that changed the Institute as it changed no other college or university in the country.

### The 1840's

Drawing from the democratization that had characterized Andrew Jackson's presidency, America during the 1840's largely ignored slavery as a central political issue, turning instead to westward expansion, the Mexican War, and to the pursuit of happiness for the common man (Sydnor 247-48). In the South, democratization during the late 1830's and

1840's also meant a loosening of the control of county governments in favor of a more centralized form of state government (Sydnor 247-48). Notable exceptions to this development occurred in South Carolina and Virginia, where aristocratic coastal gentry refused to cede power to their upcountry and western kinsmen (Sydnor 288-89). In Virginia, for example, the legislature still appointed the governor (Sydnor 288).

Not only did this refusal to free up the channels for state power create sectional division within Virginia and South Carolina, but it also symbolized an increasing trend in many other southern states: a general unwillingness to change despite a national trend toward political openness. Coupled together, growing sectionalism and static social and political environments fostered a burgeoning sense of isolationism among individual southern states. Virginia during the 1840's, long turned inward from the North, began to revel in its own heritage; regionalism as a philosophy became more and more prevalent and the number of books written about and for Virginians increased dramatically (Sydnor 309-11).

When James K. Polk from Tennessee won the Presidential election of 1844, touting a platform of "manifest destiny" and all but excluding the slavery issue, it was a signal to all Americans that the powerful democratic party in the South was slow to brook any dispute over slavery (Sydnor 322-23). Avoidance and self-delusion became the panacea for a South consumed by self-doubt and nervous paranoia. As C. Vann Woodward writes, "the pathological character of this tension [over slavery] was manifested in periodic waves of panic based largely on rumor" (62). Unable to justify the great evil that lay all around them, "southerners described what they saw as the ultimate in social perfection" (Woodward, Burden 195). Thus, as the 1830's had witnessed the emergence of this paranoia, the 1840's witnessed a denial that its cause actually existed.



As a result, the national government, controlled by Polk and the southern Democrats, turned to the conflict with Mexico as a means of diverting attention from the ever-menacing domestic situation. In the Mexican War, southerners such as Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis, future VMI faculty member, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, and 26 Virginia Military alumni (Couper, v.iv 164) distinguished themselves on the battlefield and fulfilled the southern ideal of honorable violence in the protection of American expansionism. To this extent, the war gave southerners, particularly Virginians, first-hand experience with the battlefield--an experience they took back with them and soon found vocation for in the growing military build-up that began to occur in the South in the late 1850's (Craven 7).

After the war, America's attention once again turned to the nagging economic and ethical issues that plagued the United States. Unable to address adequately what they perceived as the country's social ills, many northerners "regarded the South as an obstacle" to the country's continued progress and saw the region as a "moral pariah" (Sydnor 332). In turn, this attitude fostered further negative feelings in the South, so much so that by the late 1840's "there were those who desired a separate South" (Sydnor 331).

By 1848, the South had descended into what Charles Sydnor terms a "dream world" of its own making. In concluding his study of the South during the years 1811-1848, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, Sydnor also sums up a critical component in the Virginia Military saga: the ideal of the Old South. He writes:

Surely, southerners had come a long way from Jefferson and a long way out of reality, fighting to defend their way of life, they had taken refuge in a dream world...In the long run, the vision of the perfect South was to supply a substantial element in the construction of the romantic legend about the Old South. In the nearer future, it was to give the Confederate soldier something to die for" (338-39).

VMI's own attempts to align itself with state policy and to please the political powers in Richmond ensured that regional pride and an association with southern culture became a cornerstone of Virginia Military's mission, and, ultimately, its saga.

### The 1850's

Historian Avery Craven has alluded to this decade in American history as the period when "fear and hatred" were added to sectionalism to create nationalism in the American South (7). By 1850, hatred for northern abolitionists coupled with a paranoia about political subversion already existed in the minds of many southerners; but, the election of Zachary Taylor, a Whig, only widened the growing chasm between North and South. Simply put, Taylor "was not the ardent proponent of slavery that Southerners had hoped. . ." (Craven 59).

Moreover, the very activity that Americans had used to avoid the thorny slavery issue, expansionism, had come back to haunt them. Newly settled territories were clamoring to become states and Congress and the President were faced with a tough dilemma: were new states to be admitted as free states or as slave states? (Craven 68). Amidst this quagmire, Taylor died suddenly, leaving Millard Fillmore as President.

As a means of diffusing the burning free state/slave state question, Fillmore supported Senator Henry Clay's compromise resolution, known as the Missouri Compromise (Rubin 120). The resolution called for Missouri to be admitted as a free state along with California and determined that there was to be no slavery allowed above 36 degrees west longitude and 30 degrees north latitude (Craven 71, Rubin 120). Eager to avoid a fight at this time, the South agreed with the Compromise and thus averted open conflict with the North. However, as Craven notes, southerners had lost the initiative by allowing the North to dictate policy on the slavery issue; they would never regain this initiative (115).

By 1854, though, national events were again taking a turn towards conflict. Stephen Douglas, Senator from Illinois, presented the Kansas-Nebraska Bill on the floor of the Senate, effectively shattering the calm brought by the Missouri Compromise. The bill, which became law in 1854, "gave southerners who were ordinarily rational, an irrational edge" (Craven 185). Essentially, the Kansas-Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise by allowing individual states to decide for themselves whether to choose free or slave status (Craven 180). "Bloody Kansas" was the result, with groups of pro-slavery guerilla bands roaming the state, terrorizing the citizenry (Craven 185).

Out of "Bloody Kansas" came a man who was to affect the mission and saga of the Virginia Military Institute more than any man save Superintendent Francis Smith: John Brown. Brown had lived in Kansas and then, after moving to Missouri, killed a white man in attempting to set the man's slaves free. He fled, with the slaves in tow, to Canada where he began to hatch his next plan: a raid into Virginia to arm southern slaves for a general uprising (Smith 1155-56). To Brown, Virginia represented the evil that slavery had become; an attack on the commonwealth was therefore a symbolic attack on this evil (Woodward 60).

In October 1859, Brown and his followers attacked and captured the United States Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. United States troops under the command of Colonel Robert E. Lee, along with militia under the personal command of Governor Henry Wise of Virginia, subsequently recaptured the arsenal, killing Brown's followers and capturing the abolitionist himself (Smith 1155-56). Brown was quickly tried and sentenced to hang. The Governor then requested the services of the VMI cadets to help guard Brown until the state could carry out his execution. Superintendent Smith arrived with the cadets in December and witnessed Brown's hanging (Couper v.2, 12) (see the Government Relations section of this chapter).

In many ways, Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry ended any hopes for a compromise between the North and the South. As Woodward writes, "to the South John Brown. . . appeared as a true symbol of northern purpose" (Burden 61). Moreover, he was a threat to state governments and to the entirety of a southern society held tenuously together by slaves' willingness to accept their fate. Elegized as a martyr among vocal northern abolitionists, southerners naturally let their already overactive paranoia run rampant (Craven 350-51). Many felt that the North had leveled the first of many attacks upon southerners and southern "property" and that a grand abolitionist conspiracy was no doubt behind the entire affair (Craven 350-51).

By 1860, the situation had worsened. Abraham Lincoln's election in November 1860 set the stage for secession and all-out civil war. Lincoln had campaigned on an anti-slavery platform and with the advent of his administration many southerners felt that their entire way of life was now endangered. The possibility of secession became a very real possibility by the end of 1860 and Virginia was placed in the unique position of choosing between its own social, economic, and political traditions and the concept of a Union that many famous Virginians had helped define. As Craven writes, "Virginia's course in the crisis period was a matter of intense interest. . . A new nation without Virginia would lack a genuine southern quality. A movement without her approval and support could never be quite satisfactory. She was after all the founder and keeper of the 'southern tradition'" (384).

On December 20, 1860, the South Carolina legislature voted to secede from the Union. Alabama quickly followed (Rubin 126). Virginia's Governor, John Letcher, sent a delegation to Washington to probe the possibilities for compromise one last time; they found the Lincoln administration dead set against compromise in the face South Carolina's attack on Fort Sumter and unwilling to strike a deal with any of the border states (Craven 389-90). With

this failure fresh in mind, the Virginia General Assembly voted to secede from the Union on April 17, 1861, rather than fight against their southern brethren. Virginia then voted to join the Confederate States of America on April 25, 1861 (Rubin 128). With these developments, the Old Dominion found itself on the eve of war with its northern neighbors. And, suddenly, Virginia Military found that its military mission had taken on an entirely new prominence. Future attempts to fulfill this mission would take on added significance for Virginia and for the entire South.

### **Government Relations**

Long before the advent of the Civil War, though, Virginia Military benefitted greatly from an extremely close and cordial relationship with lawmakers and executives in Richmond. Of course, along with this coziness came a high degree of administrative control exercised by state government and a certain responsibility on the part of VMI's Board of Visitors and administration to welcome this control in order to retain state funding. One could conclude, superficially at least, that Francis Smith and the Board simply played along with state wishes for purely monetary reasons.

In fact, much more was at play than a desire for fiscal solvency. For the most part, Superintendent Smith and the various Board of Visitors' Chairmen were loyal Virginians with strong attachments to the government in Richmond and with equally strong favoritism for the policies the government promulgated. As a result, during the period of 1840 to 1860, VMI strove diligently to fulfill a mission closely linked to state policy, not merely to retain state funding, but because institutional leaders were deeply supportive of government policies as well. In turn, these policies represented a strong support for key elements of southern antebellum culture. In this way, fulfilling mission--whether to keep vital state funding or to show loyalty to Virginia--linked VMI forever with the Old South and with Virginia culture.

### The 1840's

VMI took great pains to publicize its relationship with Richmond. For example, Smith felt that the curriculum should contain more than just classroom work and the occasional military drill. The VMI experience should include actual experience in the field that would enable the young men to see, feel, and hear life in a military encampment. As a result he ordered on August 3, 1840 that cadets would make camp on the institution's parade grounds and that "in honor of the present Chief Magistrate of the Commonwealth, the camp will be styled Camp Gilmer" (Order, Superintendent's Orders 1840). Thus, Smith quite cleverly intertwined a critical segment of the cadets' training with an homage to the governor and in so doing set a precedent for all future summer encampments. Additionally, when Governor Gilmer himself arrived to inspect the camp named in his honor, the symbolic relationship between government and institutional mission was made whole (Couper, v.I 78).

Governors were not the only state officials to take an ongoing interest in the Institute's progress, though. One influential state official who served ex officio on the Board of Visitors for many years was State Librarian and later Adjutant General William H. Richardson. Superintendent Smith corresponded with General Richardson on an almost daily basis about even the smallest of affairs related to the Institute. In a letter from Smith to Richardson dated March 30, 1841, we see just how important Richardson's ties with VMI had already become and how strongly Smith wished to sell his small school to policymakers in Richmond. Smith writes, "the Institute is exciting a deep interest throughout the country" (by which he probably meant Virginia). He then goes on to invite Richardson to the end of session examinations that will serve "as an opportunity to our distinguished citizens to examine" the cadets and the school. We also see just how vital a friend in state government can be when Smith thanks Richardson for helping to introduce legislation in Richmond for creation of the Institute's new library: "my thanks to you for interest you have shown in bringing this subject

in the first place to the notice of the Legislature and subsequently aiding in its passage" (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, 1840-44).

An even more revealing letter of Smith to Richardson dated April 15, 1841, again seeks to tie the VMI mission to state policies and to the welfare of Virginia as a whole. In asking Richardson to help secure artillery pieces from the governor, Smith writes, "the interests of the militia would be much advanced if the Executive would be proper to order for the State. . . 2 or 3 howitzers" (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, 1840-44). Note that the Superintendent equates artillery pieces for the school with pieces "for the State." Moreover, one gets the distinctive feeling that when Smith mentions "the State," he is not merely referring to the welfare of the citizens but to the government. For example, he goes on in the letter to refer to a specific government entity, the militia:

"Among the many advantages which our Institution is calculated to afford to the State, my object is particularly to elevate the character of the militia. The present system is a complete caricature and everyone admits it. If 30 or 40 well-educated young men graduate from VMI every year, the State will then be supplied with a number of efficient officers. . ." (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, 1840-44).

Richardson's return letter of April 27 indicates that while the Governor was not willing to send howitzers to the Institute, he did agree that the Institute could greatly benefit the militia system. Importantly, too, Richardson notes that he is sending even more "duplicates from the Library" (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1839-42). Indeed, the legislature had only recently passed the measure ensuring that duplicates from the State library were to be shipped to the Institute for starting a new academic library (Couper, v.I 94). By 1844, even though the Institute had total administrative control of the library and a cadet was appointed "Librarian," Smith still referred to it as the "State Library" (Order, Superintendent's Orders, December 14, 1844).

But Richardson was not the only leverage for VMI in the capital. In cases where the importance of the issue demanded some extraordinary tactics to ensure legislative compliance, Smith would send the cadets themselves, en masse, to Richmond to lobby the General Assembly. The first of many such excursions came in late December and early January 1841-42, when the cadets travelled by boat and on foot to Richmond to lobby passage of VMI's budget and to take winter examinations before the governor and legislators (Couper, v.I 89). While there, the cadets were presented with a flag bearing the motto, *Virginiae Fidem Praesto*, roughly translated as "always faithful to Virginia." Smith replied to the presenters that "the motto you which you have selected is deeply significant. It enjoins duty, fidelity--none more appropriate to the citizen soldier. It points out to whom this fidelity is due--to Virginia. . ." (Couper, v.I 91).

Smith's words surely helped his cause with the legislature. Claudius Crozet, one of the founders of the Institute, State Engineer, and now Chairman of the Board of Visitors, wrote to Smith on January 25, 1842, that "the Cadets have made a very favorable impression. . .They have done much towards the success of the application [for additional funding] to the Legislature. . ." (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1839-42). Sure enough, the lobbying paid off--literally. The General Assembly passed a funding measure worth an additional \$1,500 a year on March 8 of the same year (Acts, 1842) and VMI found itself once again combining elements of its mission (e.g., examining cadets and conducting field exercises) with state government lobbying.

The Act of March 8, 1842, also introduced another component of state funding that was beginning to have an impact both on the Institute as well as on the state as a whole: the State Cadets program (Acts, 1842). As enacted, the addendum to the law creating VMI required the Board of Visitors to "admit as State cadets free of charge for board and tuition.



. .not less than fifty young men. . .one of whom shall be selected from each of the senatorial districts as at present constituted" (Virginia Code, 1860). The state also stipulated that these cadets, in return for their tuition and board, would act as teachers in Virginia schools for two years after their graduation from the Institute (Acts, 1842).

Virginia Military took its responsibility as a teacher training institution as well as military school quite seriously. After all, this provided yet another chance for the Institute to prove its worth to the state on an ongoing basis and strengthened the tether between VMI's mission and state government's agenda. By July of 1848, the Institute itself requested the legislature

"to pass a law disqualifying any State Cadet who has received or shall here receive his education at this Institution from holding any office of honor, trust or profit in this commonwealth unless the said Cadet shall have first complied with the requirement that he shall teach in some University, College, academy, school or other place of instruction with in this commonwealth two years after leaving this Institute. . ." (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 8, 1848).

Legislative lobbying became more and more a permanent feature of Smith's duties during the 1840's as the Institute's need for additional faculty and facilities increased. Of course, the only real opportunity for capital improvement lay with the state. Delegates from the Lexington area proved eager to help the fledgling school, even to the extent of counseling Smith on just how and when to lobby the General Assembly. Delegate C.P. Dorman, who was later to become a member of the VMI Board, wrote Smith on March 17, 1847, of his disappointment at a vote in the House on funding for a faculty position in and a laboratory for the physical sciences and suggested lobbying for the funding in "another year." (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1847). Such advice was indispensable to Smith in his attempts at gauging the personality of the legislature and signalled VMI's ability to use members of the general assembly itself as lobbyists on the Institute's behalf.

Not all of the state's support was financial, though. We see evidence of the close link between the school and state government at public ceremonies as well. In fact, it is perhaps with graduation ceremonies and the like where the relationship between VMI and government is best symbolized. For example, Giles Gunn, a local school teacher, wrote that on commencement day July 4, 1848, "the Governor of the State was there to sign the diplomas" and that "attended by the State brass band, the cadets marched [forth] from the Institute" (Couper, v.I 180). First, obtaining the governor's signature on the diplomas signifies VMI's stature within the state and attests to its authority to grant degrees as a legitimate institution of higher education. In this sense, a state official acts to ratify Virginia Military's existence as a college. Moreover, the presence of the State brass band represents the extent to which the state influences VMI's public ceremonies and rituals.

However, despite its decided streak of paternalism during the 1840's, state government was still willing to view Virginia Military as an educational institution and not merely another segment of the state militia. An act passed by the General Assembly on February 19, 1845, decreed that "officers and cadets shall be exempt from the performance of militia duty during their continuance at said institute" (Acts, 1845). Through this act, the legislature reinforced Smith's contention that the Institute's main mission relative to the militia was to train future officers and not to augment the existing militia force. Thus, the act provides state sanction of yet another aspect of the early VMI mission, the emphasis of education and military training over military duty. That this fundamental component in the VMI mission would change so dramatically by 1859 when John Brown threatened the Commonwealth directly and the Governor requested the Institute's aid as military force, only reveals the immense changes that befell Virginia society between 1845 and 1859.

By mid-1848, we see evidence in Smith's rhetoric of attempts to convince state officials that VMI has succeeded in its mission as partially established by state government. One gets the sense that whether this was actually the case or not, Smith feels compelled at this time to bring the issue to a head as a way of soliciting agreement from the governor's office and the General Assembly. He wants to insure that government officials view VMI as an institution that is fulfilling its mission and he hopes his words will bring about this conclusion. For example, in the Superintendent's Report of 1848 (Superintendent's Report, July 3, 1848), Smith writes:

"The Establishment of this Institute by the Legislature of the State has now ceased to be an experiment and we are confident in the opinion that its public usefulness will be limited only by the means which the Legislature may appropriate to its support and enlargement."

Note also that Smith combines his affirmation of VMI's fulfillment of mission with the opportunity to request additional funding.

The rhetoric quickly bore fruit. A legislative act of March 8, 1850, endowed the Institute with an additional \$46,000 for capital improvements, notably the construction of a much needed new cadet barracks (F. Smith, VMI 128). In describing this appropriation in his autobiographical Virginia Military Institute, Smith summarizes the symbiotic relationship between VMI and the state relative to institutional mission. He concludes that "the State of Virginia had so signally impressed her seal of approbation upon the work accomplished by this young school as to provide for cadets' barracks. . ." (129). In short, funding signalled approval.

### The 1850's

For a large part of this decade, Virginia Military's relationship with state government continued on much the same path as it had in the 1840's. In fulfilling its mission, the Institute was continuing to strengthen its ties to state policies, a process that was to lead to

the governor's use of the cadets at the execution of John Brown in 1859 and that was to culminate in VMI's role in the Civil War.

The events surrounding commencement day, July 4, 1850, foreshadowed the changes that would soon envelop VMI near the end of this decade. Delivered in the same year as the adoption of the Missouri Compromise, Judge John W. Brockenbrough's address to the cadets at the laying of the cornerstone for the new barracks must have seemed yet another affirmation of the importance of VMI's mission relative to state, regional, and now national issues. At the end of his lengthy speech, which recounted the history of the Institute, Brockenbrough warns of a day in the near future when the Institute may be called into service to protect Virginia:

"I cannot forbear to advert to a topic which connects itself but too naturally, yet most painfully, with the military character of this school. The eyes of this whole people are watching with intense interest the result of the fearful struggle which now convulses our great confederacy. . .Where will the first shock. . .of civil war be felt? Look at the frontier position of Virginia in these dismembered States, and you will see her the Thermopylae of the South. . .If that cry of terrible and historical significance shall once more ring through her borders, "We must fight!"--then will she [Virginia] realize the true value of her. . .Military Institute. In that dark hour, if come it must, she will turn with assured hope to the hundreds of the alumni of this school, and can any doubt that they will be the first to rush to the rescue of their beloved Virginia, and repulse the invaders from her soil? (Brockenbrough, 16-18).

If the Judge had known the clairvoyance of his words, he may have scared even himself. What he did realize, however, was that the Institute was part and parcel of Virginia culture and, thus, of the southern antebellum culture under attack already by northern extremists. Like most southern institutions, the Institute would fight for Virginia's sovereignty and for southern self-determination. Therefore, VMI's greatest asset to the state and to its own success as an institution of higher education was its loyalty to the state and region combined with the military aspects of its mission.

However, by 1852, Superintendent Smith was also finding out that a close relationship with the General Assembly could turn into a double-edged sword. Responding to several complaints from the parents of cadets who felt that Smith and the VMI administration had given out too many demerits, the state Senate appointed a committee composed of thirteen senators to investigate Smith's disciplinary actions (F. Smith, VMI 245). The Governor, J.M. Gregory, represented the complainant in the proceedings, Peyton Johnston (245). Smith was called before the committee to explain the reasoning behind the assessment of demerits at VMI. The superintendent argued that young men of the "age when waywardness is the only fully developed trait in their character" required the "unbending rules of military discipline" to assure their reaching maturity while at VMI (Smith 246). More than anything else, Smith's comments speak to his beliefs about student development--namely, that young men are incorrigibly "wayward" by nature and require stiff discipline from their elders at every turn. Indeed, this ideology pervades Virginia Military throughout the nineteenth century.

In any case, the committee found Smith absolutely justified in his assessment of demerits, a decision accepted wholly by the complainant (Couper, v.I 269). The ruling of the committee represented a type of senatorial legitimation of the Institute's implementation of mission and helped show the importance the state placed on monitoring VMI's internal operations.

However, no senate committee could sanction the influence of the state on the VMI mission to the degree that the Institute itself could. In July 1859, the Board of Visitors deemed

"it their duty explicitly to announce to the corp of cadets that when a cadet enters the Virginia Military Institute, he enters the service of the State, under the military command of those appointed to govern it, and that he is not subject to the control of

his parents except in subordination to the laws and authority of the Institute. . ."  
(Board of Visitors Report, July/August 1859).

As Couper notes, the Board probably moved in response to events that pointed toward civil war with the North (v.II 42). After the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and the violence that ensued with its passage, Virginians became increasingly worried by the possibility of abolitionist-led slave insurrections (Rubin 120). State leaders looked for bulwarks against this possibility and as a military citadel, VMI naturally came to mind (Couper, v.II 42-3).

The Board's action was the first in a series of events in 1859 that revealed how closely tied to state policy VMI's mission had become. With its July resolution, the Board paved the way for the governor's summoning of the cadets at Harper's Ferry in November and December 1859 and forever erased any doubts as to where VMI owed its loyalty. On paper, state policy was fast becoming a larger and larger component of VMI's mission.

Moreover, the Board's 1859 report also includes a somewhat enigmatic section written to Governor Henry Wise from the President of the Board, Phillip St. George Cocke. In writing about the mission of "collegiate institutions" in the South, Cocke notes that the South has been "working up her resources to . . . enter upon a friendly and glorious rivalry with the rest of the world in letters and culture. . ." He concludes by analogizing this cultural and academic rivalry to a military conflict:

"As Virginians, we may be reminded that. . .our own hitherto useful and popular military may be prepared to encounter the 'friendly, glorious rivalry' . . .fully equipped. . .and in a spirit of full generous competition" (Board of Visitors Report, July/August 1859).

As with the rest of the South, Cocke sees VMI in "competition" with the "rest of the world"--the North. If one takes the competition metaphor a step further, Cocke seems to be assuring Wise that VMI has helped Virginia to "be prepared to encounter the . . .rivalry. . .fully equipped"

in a military rather than a cultural sense. He could be touting VMI's military mission and usefulness to the state in the face of a possible war with the North.

And, indeed, Virginia Military's first real-life military action in defense of the commonwealth came soon after the date of Cocke's report. On October 6, 1859, John Brown and a party of 18 men, some of whom were escaped and freed slaves, attacked and captured the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia (Couper, v.II 3). The South's worst nightmare had become reality: abolitionists had attacked a military establishment with the intent of arming slaves.

President James Buchanan ordered Colonel Robert E. Lee, visiting his home in Arlington at the time, to command the Federal troops in their attempt to recapture the arsenal. Virginia Governor Henry Wise ordered out the Virginia militia, too. On October 7, having arrived in Harper's Ferry, Lee gave the Virginians the opportunity to attack Brown and his men; they declined and Lee himself attacked, capturing Brown and killing all but four of his men (Couper, v. II 4-6).

Brought to trial within two weeks, Brown was convicted and sentenced to hang on December 2, 1859. Superintendent Smith quickly tendered the services of VMI to the Governor, who, through Adjutant General William Richardson declined the offer:

"The Governor desires me to thank you for the tender of services of the corps of cadets, and to say that there is no present need for them, but that he wishes you to be ready in case of a call" (Richardson to Smith, November 8, 1859, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence 1859).

Swelling with pride for his native state and for VMI's success in fulfilling its mission, Richardson goes on to write that:

"You can conceive better than I can express my own feelings growing out of this tender of service from that noble band of Virginia youth which is the pride and the richest jewel of our dear old mother State. My mind runs back in a moment to the beginning-- beset with difficulties and discouragement, and travels on with you, contending almost single-handed with, and finally overcoming them all, to this day of triumph when you can present to the Governor of the State such an array of her sons in arms. I . . . feel that tho Empires may crumble, the standard of Old Virginia will wave in triumph while the world remains" (Richardson to Smith, November 8, 1859, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1859).

The letter must have warmed Smith, confirming to him that VMI was indeed an integral part of Virginia tradition and state government policy. To the social historian, the letter also reveals the great degree of regional pride that pervaded the highest levels of state government in the wake of the John Brown raid. Although Brown had attacked a federal arsenal, Richardson seems to see Virginia as the real victim, rather than the federal government or the United States as a whole. Richardson also seems to understand the essentially historical nature of VMI's evolving mission and correlates fulfillment of this mission with "service" to the "old mother State."

Despite Wise's initial decline to use the corps, Smith probably knew from Richardson or from another source that the cadets would be employed at some point to guard Brown before and during his execution. Smith writes in order number 237 to the cadets, dated November 19, 1859, that "in anticipation of orders from the Governor for the services of the Corps of Cadets,. . .those cadets who have been detailed for such service will hold themselves in readiness to take up the line of march at a moment's notice (Superintendent's Orders, 1859).

On November 22, Smith received a telegraph dispatch from Governor Wise in Charlestown, Virginia. Smith transcribed the message into his order book as order number 243: "dispatch message to Col. F.H. Smith, Supt. of Va Military Institute, that his corps of Howitzers is required at Charlestown by the 1st of December next. He will come ahead & let his corps follow" (Superintendent's Order Book, November 23, 1859). Note that by this point,



Wise is issuing orders to the Institute just as if it were part of the state militia and that he particularly requests the presence of the howitzers first, rather than the cadets. VMI is serving a purely military role for the government at this point.

Smith alludes to the fact that the Institute has been subsumed by the state in his "General Order No. 9" issued in camp at Charlestown on November 28, 1859. He reminds the cadets that "the detachment of cadets called into the service of the State being now on war-footing, all the rules and articles of war governing an army in the field will govern this communion" (Superintendent's Order Book, 1859). What an internship experience! The assignment at Harper's Ferry had become the perfect expression of VMI's usefulness to the state and to its cadets who hoped to embark on military careers. The marriage of mission to state policy was at its most complete stage prior to the Civil War.

Security was tight surrounding the actual execution. Major John Preston, quartermaster for the VMI companies stationed at Charlestown, one of the founding fathers of the Institute, and author of the "Cives" articles (Couper, v. II 11), gives a full account of the day in a letter to his wife. After graphically detailing Brown's hanging, he goes on to comment that "a sovereign state had been assailed, and she had uttered but a hint, and her sons had hastened to show that they were ready to defend her." He goes on to repeat the words he shouted as Brown swung lifelessly from the scaffold: "So perish all such enemies of Virginia! all such enemies of the Union! all such foes of the human race" (M.J. Preston 111).

Preston's language provides perhaps the best example we have of just how closely linked VMI had become to Virginia's fate and the fate of the South. There is little question that Preston (and thus, more than likely, the VMI administration and Board) felt that Brown had attacked their home state and their native culture (note that Preston mentions Brown's

transgression against Virginia before he mentions crimes against the Union). Preston's nationalistic pride could only have been indicative of that felt by most Virginians present that day in Charlestown and certainly represented the growing support at VMI of Virginia government's belief in its own "sovereignty." Truly, VMI had finally proven itself as completely loyal to state aims as well as a valuable military asset. In the coming years, Richmond would remember favorably VMI's role in guarding John Brown.

After the execution, the cadets returned to Lexington, resuming their usual duties by December 12, 1859 (Order No. 247, Superintendent's Orders, 1859). But events outside the Institute's walls had precluded things from returning to normal for quite some time. With the rumblings of war in the distance, the state General Assembly was only too glad to appropriate additional funding for "such munitions of war that may be demanded by the wants of the state. . ." (Acts, 1860). Legislators gave VMI \$20,000 for "the erection of such buildings, as may in the judgement of the board of visitors, be demanded for giving effect to the purposes of this act" (Acts, 1860). This brought the total state appropriation for the session to \$120,000 (Couper, v. II 33). Furthermore, in an action that symbolized VMI's role as a new component of Virginia's "home guard," the legislature gave state military rank to all administrators and faculty at the Institute, thus ensuring that the Institute's officers were also state militia officers (Couper, v. II 41).

In this capacity, Smith was made a Colonel in the state militia, and as such, could represent the governor's office on visits out-of-state. On one such visit to New York in the Summer of 1860 brought Smith into contact with General Winfield Scott, commander of the United States Army, and a Virginian by birth (Couper, v. II 56-7). Smith talked candidly with Scott in New York and upon arriving back in Lexington, wrote him a letter detailing his (and

thus, the Institute's) position on Virginia's sovereignty and the issue of secession. Smith writes:

"I have no certain knowledge of the course Virginia may take--she is now pressing forward with earnestness her military defenses. . .

". . . I said to the Governor that I had represented to you that the feeling in Virginia, at this time, was opposed to secession, and that a large majority of her people would not regard the election of Mr. Lincoln as a sufficient cause for secession; and that while this sentiment was deeply rooted in the heart of the state, there was another one even more universally pervading it, and that was resistance to any hostile or coercive act on the part of the General Government toward any state or states that might secede. . ." (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, October 26, 1860).

By the date of the letter, only months before the first shots were fired on Fort Sumter, Smith can represent the "feeling of Virginia" and the Governor of Virginia to the most powerful military leader in the North. He has become one of the state's premier military leaders and spokesmen, a position that places him at the very forefront of the entire crisis then facing the commonwealth. The institutional personality of VMI--carefully sculptured by Smith into the form of a mission sanctioned by state government at almost every turn--stood resolutely with the Superintendent in its support for Virginia and the sovereignty of southern culture.

With VMI's ability to please the state on such a continuing basis, the Institute was able to establish a strong core of external support. In the context of Clark's elements for institutional distinction, VMI was already well on the way to establishing what Clark labels "the social base":

"a college seeking distinctiveness must make believers out of thousands of people on the outside whose lives are not directly bound up in the fate of the college. To the extent that outsiders believe it, the college achieves a differentiated, protected position in the markets and organizational complexes that allocate money, personnel, and students" (250).

In the wake of Harper's Ferry, there was little doubt that most of the citizens of the commonwealth and certainly the state's most powerful public officials now "believed" in the VMI mission.

### **Academic Affairs**

As with other components of the Institute during the period from 1840 to 1860, academics (faculty and coursework) played an important role in helping to fulfill the VMI mission. While it may have entwined itself often with state government, the Institute still saw itself as an academic institution with a responsibility for fulfilling the academic component of its mission. After all, in the long run, training good "citizen-soldiers" for service to the commonwealth was just as important as rendering occasional military service during state emergencies. In other words, the Institute's academic affairs comprised a chief component of the state-mandated mission VMI strove to fulfill during this period and strengthened the school's ties with antebellum southern culture.

As a caretaker of southern manhood, the Institute took great care to follow important social conventions prevalent in the antebellum South. One such convention was the concept of honor. From its establishment in 1839, VMI followed this largely uncoded system of rules which all cadets were responsible for following. In the first Board of Visitors Report to the Governor, Claudius Crozet, then President of the Board, explains that "here will be a school. . .the essential principle of which will be a sense of honor and duty" (Board of Visitors Minutes, November 21, 1839). The code, as interpreted by Smith, Preston, Crozet, and the other founders, generally expected the cadets to behave in accordance with acceptable social conventions. Wyatt-Brown catalogues these conventions as high regard for valor in the service of country and family, regard for the opinion of others as a component in personal identity,

physical appearance as a sign of inner strength, the defense of male integrity, and mixed fear and love of women (Honor and Violence 27-31).

Importantly, too, VMI's use of the honor code as a central measurement of student success provided a direct link with the predominant social construct among southern white males. Thus, cadets trained to make good "citizens" (white males who adhered to an honorable lifestyle) as well as good soldiers. Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains how citizenship became linked with honor: "honor in the pre-Civil War slave states was an encoded system, a matter of interchanges between the individual and the community. . ." (Honor and Violence vii). In this sense, VMI's honor code instilled in its young men an appreciation of public will, in this case that of landed white males.

By teaching this appreciation and by adhering to the southern ideal of the honorable male, VMI also (perhaps unconsciously) tied itself to the South's "peculiar institution," slavery. Living an honorable life in the antebellum south meant maintaining a "good" name, one worth defending before others in the community. Furthermore, in order to possess a "good" name, one necessarily retained control over some important commodity. And, of course, there was no more precious commodity in the antebellum South than human beings--slaves. Thus, "slavery and honor were mutually independent" in the South (Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence ix). Owning slaves gave white males power and from power came "honor." By indoctrinating its students in the honor code, then, VMI was also indoctrinating them in the code of behavior followed by the ruling class in the South. In this way, a critical component in VMI's curriculum became tied to honor, a critical element of antebellum culture.

Of course, instilling honorable conduct in the cadets required hiring honorable men to teach and administer classes. Suitably, the first two faculty hired at VMI were both native

Virginians with strong ties to the military establishment in the State. Francis Smith, a West Point graduate and professor of mathematics at Hampden-Sydney, was appointed "Principal Professor and Commandant of the Institute" and awarded the rank of major; J.T.L. Preston, author of the "Cives" letters and son of a state legislator, was awarded the military rank of Captain and hired as an assistant professor (Board of Visitors Report, November 21, 1839). Preston was to teach modern languages and Smith the rest of the curriculum (Board of Visitors Report, November 21, 1839). In addition to these paid positions, the Board also hired Dr. Harry Estill, a Lexington physician, to act as surgeon. Gratuitous positions included treasurer and steward (Couper, v. I 56). Thus, by the winter of 1840, the Institute had hired five academic officers, two of which doubled as teaching faculty.

We also know from the first Board report that the expenditures of the Institute ran to around \$9,914 during the first year of operation and that this figure was based on the matriculation of 32 regular (state) cadets (Board of Visitors Report, November 21, 1839). The expense account also records \$300 spent for musicians and \$250 spent for servants; these monies were not for salaries, but for room and board--both the musicians and the servants were black slaves (Couper, v. I 56).

In an effort to bring the Institute's first year to a successful close, the Board planned to conduct its first set of public examinations on July 4, 1840. By conducting these examinations, VMI borrowed a centuries-old collegiate tradition of testing students in public, thus leaving little doubt as to its nature as an academic institution as well as a state arsenal. Furthermore, we know from Smith's Virginia Military Institute that the examinations "embraced Algebra, Geometry, and Trigonometry in Mathematics, and French" (63) and that their rigor was designed to show that "the examination was no 'made up' affair" and that the Institute took itself seriously as an academic college (64). Moreover, Smith and Preston's

absolute devotion to the Institute started a tradition of strong faculty support for the Board's regulations and traditions that continued throughout the nineteenth century.

By the end of the 1840-41 academic year, though, two faculty members were hardly enough to satisfy the needs of the Institute. In a July 19, 1841, letter to Captain Thomas Williamson of Norfolk, Smith writes "Sir, I am instructed by the Board of Visitors of the V.M.I. to inform you that they have appointed you Instructor of Tactics and Professor of Drawing and Civil Engineering with the rank and title of Captain" (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence 1840-44). This new faculty position indicates that the curriculum at VMI was expanding to include engineering as cadets from the second class moved into the first and final class, where the Board had originally planned for offering engineering coursework (Board of Visitors Minutes, June 7, 1839). Williamson's hiring is the first sign that the Board and Smith saw professional education as a viable alternative to the classical study offered in most all antebellum colleges. The engineering program was also the first step of many to follow that linked the curriculum directly with Virginia Military's desire to please state government by fulfilling an applied mission.

Another important development related to faculty and to Virginia Military's evolution as an academic institution also came in July 1841. The Board of Visitors amended the Institute's regulations so that "the title of the commanding officer [was] changed to that of Superintendent with the rank of colonel" (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 10, 1841). By referring to Smith as a "superintendent" rather than as a "commandant" or a "principal professor," the Board essentially created a chief executive's position. Superintendent connotes a leadership position in an institutional setting--whether military or in a school system. Moreover, this institutional connotation ensured that VMI was viewed as something more than just a military establishment (as the title "commandant" implies). Also, the title, used by all

successive chief executives as VMI, represented a position of definitive administrative leadership apart from the faculty. Of course, owing to VMI's military nature and to those aspects of its mission that were largely vocational, the Board was careful not to use the title of "president," which is more closely associated with classical colleges. At a broader level, the title change signalled that VMI was establishing administrative structures that symbolized its own unique mission as a state school with both academic and military aspirations.

Later, in November of the same year, Smith himself took further action to solidify the academic component of VMI's mission and to reaffirm the school's link with Virginia state government. Smith contracted Robert Weir of West Point, New York, to design the VMI seal and the Institute's diploma. Smith describes the Institute to Weir in the following terms:

". . .the Institute is a State institution. In its ephemeral features, it does not differ from the West Point Academy. If there be any difference in them, ours is more of a Literary cast than the Academy. . ."

Smith goes on to detail his requirements for the diploma by noting that he would like some facsimile of the Natural Bridge (a notable landmark in Rockbridge County) imprinted on the diploma and that there be ample space available for the Governor's signature. Smith even discloses to Weir that the Governor himself will hand a diploma to each cadet (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, 1840-44). Most importantly, though, the ability to grant a diploma and a degree via the auspices of the state symbolizes the Institute's status as a legitimate college. In fact, only three months after Smith's letter, the General Assembly officially authorized the "degree of graduate of the institute upon such cadets as are found qualified to receive it. . ." (Acts, 1842).



All of the bother over diplomas preceded the Institute's first graduation ceremony, held on July 4, 1842. The first exercises were held not at VMI but at a Presbyterian church in Lexington. The Lexington Gazette announced the events of the day in its July 7, 1842, edition:

"The first Commencement day of the Virginia Military Institute! . . . a school which, with the encouragement it deserves from the Legislature, will soon be equal in every aspect to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point--a school which is destined to confer the greatest blessing on Virginia, in sending forth accomplished soldiers to impart skill and discipline and a military spirit in her militia; and in giving to her common schools gentlemen who are educated, and capable to instruct the youth of our State" (1).

The Gazette represented well the academic mission of VMI, both in its military and civil aspects. Present at the graduation was the Governor, who passed out the diplomas to the first sixteen graduates, and several members of the General Assembly. Former governor, David Campbell was also in attendance (Couper, v.I 99-100). The ceremony also included one important feature that continued throughout Smith's tenure as Superintendent--the gift to each graduate of a Bible personally inscribed by Smith himself (Couper, v.I 96).

So what did the first graduates of VMI take with them as they left Lexington? We get some idea of the curriculum taught at VMI at this time from the 1843 catalogue, the Register of the Officers and Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute. The school offered a three-year course of study beginning with the "third class" or freshmen year and culminating with the cadets' matriculation into the "first class" in their last year at the Institute (12-13).

A break down of the coursework reveals that mathematics, French, Latin, and drawing comprised the coursework for both the third and second classes; natural philosophy and chemistry, rhetoric and English literature, engineering, science of war, and infantry tactics were taught to the first class (12-13). Note that the offerings were practical, but academic, especially at the lower levels. Also, VMI deviated dramatically from most colleges of its day by offering English literature and French among its liberal arts courses. As the cadets

progressed through the curriculum, hopefully possessing a solid foundation in the "basics," they enrolled in specific military/vocational courses. Ostensibly, then, the VMI graduate was a well-rounded student of both the liberal arts and of areas critical for success in the military. The curriculum was indeed useful for the two prime academic purposes the state saw VMI as serving: as training ground for militia officers and as school teachers for secondary schools.

Importantly, too, we learn that some of the 54 cadets enrolled at in the Institute in that year served as "assistant professors" of French, Latin, and Mathematics for the third class (12). The presence of only four faculty--Smith, Preston, Williamson, and Armstrong (adjunct and a full-time chemistry professor at Washington College) (3)--necessitated cadets teaching and required faculty to teach several classes each week, in addition to fulfilling administrative duties such as military drills and inspections.

The 1843 Register devotes a lengthy section to "Explanation of the Conduct Roll"--demerits--thus making plain just how seriously the administration took behavioral or honor code infractions. There were "seven grades of demerit: 10, 8, 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, with the first grade counting the most (10). The catalogue explains that "when a cadet has more than 200 demerits in any one year, he is dismissed" (10).

Soon, however, Smith was again contemplating changes in the VMI curriculum and he went so far as to solicit advice from D. H. Mahan, the famous professor at West Point. Mahan eased Smith's fears that the Institute would be abolished if it failed to prove useful to the state General Assembly and suggested that Smith broaden the curriculum to include a religion course (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, October 17, 1843). Smith did indeed broaden the curriculum, but not by adding religion. Instead, he and the Board of Visitors added a fourth year to the Institute's curriculum, making mandatory a seminar in English, additional arithmetic, and geography in the first year of study (Board of Visitors

Minutes, July 5, 1845). The extension of the cadet's stay at the Institute freed up the final two years of study for more coursework devoted to the military and vocational training Smith knew was vital to fulfilling VMI's mission as understood by the majority of state officials.

Strangely enough, however, while Smith enjoyed the support of the state government during this period and rarely faced student dissension of any kind (see section on "Student Affairs"), he did face some faculty unrest. In the Board of Visitor's Minutes dated September 24, 1845, the Board agreed that Captain Thomas Williamson, who taught tactics and drawing, was "guilty of gross insubordination and unofficer like conduct in using disrespectful and improper language towards, and making a personal assault upon the Superintendent. . ." (Board of Visitors Minutes, 1845). The Board suspended Williamson from his duties as professor for three months without pay. Unfortunately, there is little record of precisely what caused the incident, but the mere fact of its occurrence reveals that the Institute's faculty were not always happy with their circumstances. Moreover, in this, the first real test of Smith's authority as superintendent, the Board upheld his near complete control over the faculty, thus ensuring that all academic matters were settled on the superintendent's desk and now placing both the academic as well as military components of the VMI mission in Smith's hands. He was, to a large extent, the rightful "sovereign" of the Institute.

Fortunately for the welfare of the Institute, though, Smith was an excellent academic leader as well as administrator. He realized early on that VMI differed greatly from most of its collegiate counterparts and that this difference was the chief source of its influence within the state. As a result, Smith seemed to carry with him a grand design of the Institute's glorious future; and, he was forever soliciting aid and advice that would help him to reach this end. For example, in his June 28, 1850 Superintendent's report he mentions the work of Brown University President, Francis Wayland, as a bulwark for the Institute's applied

mission. Smith cites Wayland's remark about West Point providing more "internal improvements for the U.S. than all the other colleges combined" (Superintendent's Report, June 28, 1850). He then goes on to add "the same results are expected here." First, choosing Wayland as a source for justifying VMI's mission to the Governor tells us that Smith, as the executive of a non-traditional college, sympathizes with the attempts of Wayland and his contemporaries to transform the American college into a better instrument of public will. As Frederick Rudolph notes, "Wayland, who was anxious that Americans develop institutions that would serve American purposes, rejected the Oxford-Cambridge tradition as being 'utterly unsuited'" (90). Second, by quoting Wayland, Smith places himself at the forefront of the changes that were occurring in American higher education during the educational "crisis" of the 1850's (Rudolph 221). Wayland wanted a new course of study for a new set of needs and VMI's curriculum and mission provided just that new course (Rudolph 238). In fact, the Institute can be seen as radical for its time in that it relied on the state government for primary support rather than a religious sect and was profoundly secular and applied in nature.

That so influential a collegiate leader as Wayland supported, albeit indirectly, the mission of Virginia Military must have confirmed to Smith that he and his school were headed in the right direction and that VMI's academic mission was sure to find even greater success as time progressed. Change was in the air in the educational marketplace and VMI, in fulfilling its mission, was helping to bring about that change.

Also, by 1850, the VMI curriculum was showing signs of broadening to include a whole host of professional courses and basic mathematics related to VMI's military and civilian responsibilities. The 1850 edition of the Register of Officers and Cadets is a much lengthier document than its 1843 counterpart. The Register begins its description of the Institute by noting that "The Virginia Military Institute was established and is supported by the State of

Virginia," leaving little doubt as to who holds ultimate authority over the school and who was responsible for its existence in the first place (2). Moreover, in listing the Board of Visitors for the Institute, "His Excellency John B. Floyd, Governor of Virginia" is listed at the top as "Inspector (Ex Officio)" (3).

Since 1843, the total number of staff at VMI had grown from eleven to seventeen and the faculty from four to seven. Importantly, the school now seems to making a distinction between the faculty and the administration. Officers not directly related to instruction are listed separately as "military staff" (4), thus representing VMI's movement toward a more modern collegiate organization where faculty hold different responsibilities than administrators.

A number of upper level mathematical courses--descriptive geometry, differential and integral calculus, analytical geometry--have been added to the second class (junior year) curriculum, thus increasing the number of total classes required and also expanding higher order problem solving as a segment of the curriculum. The fourth class (senior year) courses, on the other hand, provide for a military application of these upper level problem solving courses--military and civil engineering, tactics, infantry, and artillery--and also include more qualitative, classical offerings such as rhetoric and geography and history (9). All in all, these curricular changes represent VMI's attempts at providing a more complete, well-rounded education aimed at service to state and nation. One gets the distinct feeling that with these offerings, the Institute can now begin to call itself a "collegiate institution" (if not a college) with the growing ability to implement all aspects of its mission, both military and civilian.

Smith and the Board seemed to have been relatively secure in their approach to the school's mission for most of the 1850's, for they made few if any significant changes until 1859.

On notable addition to the VMI faculty did occur in 1851 with the hiring of Thomas Jackson as professor of Natural Philosophy and Artillery Tactics (Order No. 237, August 13, 1851, Superintendent's Orders, 1851). However, in some ways, this general lack of any real change related to academic affairs is perhaps the best indicator that the Institute was simply intent on implementing a mission that had long last congealed.

But, since VMI's mission was beholden to a large extent to state policy, changing needs of the government in Richmond soon interrupted this complacency. John Brown had struck at Harper's Ferry and the Institute's mission, both academically and militarily was changed forever.

Most importantly, we see an example of how the governor's office was now "ordering" VMI faculty to complete tasks related to the state's military preparations. For example, Smith's order number 244, dated December 12, 1859 (only weeks after Brown's execution), states that

"In obedience to instructions received from the Governor of the State, Major William Gilham is detailed on special duty to prepare a synoptical [Gilham was professor of physical science] report for the instruction of the Militia Service. . ." (Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64).

Of course, this order accompanied the general use of the VMI cadets and some faculty (Smith, Preston, Gilham, and Jackson) at Charlestown for the guarding of John Brown before and during his execution. In fact, Jackson was in charge of the State Militia's artillery at Charlestown during the Brown execution and later executed a cadet drill on Capitol Square in Richmond on the way back to Lexington (Couper, v.II 11, 24). This use of the faculty represents the Institute's ultimate responsibility to state policy, even to the extent of ordering institutional staff to leave their teaching responsibilities to perform special state projects. Such activities also reveal just how closely the Institute's academic components were tied to

state government policies and how little real autonomy the school possessed over its most vital academic functions.

Subsequently, VMI's curriculum changed some in 1859 and 1860 to account for political developments within and external to the state. In December of 1859, the Institute began arduous training exercises in small sword fencing, and in the use of the bayonet, and increased the use of live rounds in both musketry and with howitzers (Couper, v. II 24-5). Cadets were also involved in field exercises on a much more regular basis (25).

By 1860, the VMI Register of Officers and Cadets records that the school had divided its coursework into four separate schools: Academic, Agriculture, Civil Engineering, and Fine Arts (Fine Arts was a school in name only at this date, having no course offerings or faculty as of yet) (12-13). The Board had also started a fifth class, equivalent to a Master's program, that included broader, more abstract coursework in military history and strategy, political economy, and the constitution of the United States. Graduates of the Institute or other officers in the state militia were eligible for enrollment (13). Within the regular four classes, new agricultural offerings included botany, histology, and veterinary practice; new academic offerings included infantry tactics and optics and acoustics, both relevant to the growing likelihood of alumni working as military officers in real world engagements (13). The school of civil engineering also offered courses directly relevant to military service, such as stability of constructions and calculation of strength of tubular bridges (14-15).

Essentially, the 1860 VMI curriculum, while expanded considerably from 1850 to cover more subjects, also provided more opportunity for direct linkage with military duty than ever before. The fifth class, in particular, was nothing short of a program in military leadership. Given the circumstances surrounding Virginia and the South in 1860, the large number of

courses VMI offered that hastened to prepare cadets for military engagement reveals the Institute's ongoing attempts to mesh its curriculum with public needs.

In summarizing academic affairs at VMI over this twenty year period, one is struck by the degree to which the curriculum and the faculty cohered into a very neat package. We see little faculty dissension and when we do, Smith and the Board manage to quash it with little effort and with few if any subsequent problems (Williamson, who had disputed Smith at one point, apologized and ended up staying on faculty for 30 years). Course offerings continued to expand throughout the period, but kept close to the evolving mission of the Institute as defined by Smith, the Board of Visitors, and ultimately, state officials.

Moreover, if one compares the academic developments at VMI with Clark's taxonomy for a distinctive college, the similarities are striking. As Clark notes, "college administrators and professors do not feel their campus is distinct unless there are special courses, unusual general education requirements, extraordinary modes of evaluation, unique ways of concentrating and spreading student effort. . ." (248). The academic program--the curriculum--at VMI certainly qualifies as individual in nature, requiring a host of "unusual general education requirements" and seeking to train cadets for specific military careers as well as a host of possible civilian careers. At the time, no institution of higher education offered this particular mix of academic and professional coursework; few if any institutions could claim to provide the variety of offerings that Virginia Military gave its students.

Also, by studying the faculty and curriculum during this period, we see just how important Superintendent Smith became to the overall direction of the Institute--he hired, rewarded, and reprimanded the faculty; he designed and approved the coursework; and, he gave all the orders relating to the instructional methods employed by the faculty. In short,



Smith placed himself in virtually complete administrative control of the Institute. There was little doubt that Smith's understanding of the VMI mission was the definitive interpretation. This control gave him the ability "to build from the top down, especially to select men for the top echelons of the administration and the faculty. . .and thus to begin with personal lieutenants rather than men voted up from the rank and file" (Clark 242). Given the loyalty of the nature of the faculty itself (men handpicked by Smith and the Board or even founders of the Institute such as Preston) and their deference to Smith even in volatile situations such as the one with Williamson, the VMI mission already retained by 1860 the "faculty dedication [that] seems a key component in the making of a college saga" (242).

### **Student Affairs**

Being a student at any college in the mid-nineteenth century was a rigorous experience mingled with the sheer terror imposed by authoritarian faculty and administrators and the somewhat suppressed joys of aping, duping, and outwitting these same faculty and administrators. Unfortunately for the cadets at VMI, the rigor and the terror were far more prevalent than the joy.

This section, rather than simply describing what it was like to be a student at VMI during this period, attempts instead to relate how faculty and administrators interacted with students and the role students played within the context of VMI's mission. With these purposes in mind, the label student affairs, which connotes issues and concerns related to students within an institutional structure, best describes the section's theme.

More than any other single feature, student affairs at VMI during the period of 1840-60 is characterized by the general lack of extracurricular activities and the close control exerted by faculty and administrators over students. In most respects, there was little if any

"student life" as we know today outside formal aspects of the approved curriculum. Since Smith, the Board, and the faculty were intent mainly on fulfilling mission, they made sure that students helped rather than hindered in this regard. Unless a student activity contributed to fulfilling mission as Smith interpreted it, it was likely to gain little administrative support. Unlike the University of Georgia, for example, where students held significant control over key institutional operations such as graduation (Coulter, College Life 165), cadets at VMI, aside from the few given teaching responsibilities, were rarely consulted on operational matters and never consulted on planning and policy decisions.

Perhaps the best place to start in regard to cadets during this period is the with Regulations of the Virginia Military Institute, an ongoing compilation of regulations and orders promulgated by the Superintendent and the Board of Visitors to "regulate" the lives of the cadets. The first set of regulations was adopted on May 30, 1839, some six months before the matriculation of the first cadet (Regulations 1839-45). We know that cadets were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five (5) and were at least four feet nine inches tall (5). They also took an oath to uphold all the regulations and to obey the faculty that began "I promise in honour. . ." (5).

However, the bulk of the regulations in this first edition are written as prohibitions on cadet behavior. Articles 65-244 are labeled "Discipline and Interior Police" and almost all begin with the words "No cadet shall. . ." to which a catalogue of intriguing possibilities are added. Article 65 lays the ground rules: "the Cadets of the Institute shall constitute a military corps, and be subject to military discipline under the command of the Principal Professor" (15). From there, we learn that the cadets could not drink, smoke or chew tobacco, or own a "waiter, horse, or dog" (15-16). Obviously, the board assumed that potential cadets would use a slave as a "waiter" rather than hiring one. Importantly, too, in a community

where students were almost entirely from the South, the Board took into consideration the possibility of duels when it prohibited cadets from accepting "a challenge to fight" or "promoting a duel" (17). Yet the regulations that reveal best how the board wanted to prohibit student interference with fulfilling institutional mission are those that would rancor students today. Article 126 held that "no cadet shall keep in his room any novel, poem, or other book, not relating to his studies, without permission from the Principal Professor" (20). This regulation sought to insure that cadets learned only what the faculty and board wanted them to learn--namely, the established curriculum. The board's attempts to keep the cadets' interests squarely on components critical to the VMI mission rather than on personal interests also extended to the prohibition of student organizations not affiliated with the Institute's curriculum and not approved by the superintendent (which turned out to be virtually everything) (28). Smith was careful to monitor each and every expression of his cadets' behavior in case it endangered the reputation of the Institute.

The Superintendent was particularly cautious in regards to any contact the young men might have with the town of Lexington (for more information on VMI's relationship with Lexington, see the Community Relations section of this chapter). For example, he reminds the cadets of "the 69th article of the Regulations that extends to visiting any Tavern or Hotel without permission" (Order No. 3, November 18, 1839, Superintendent's Orders, 1839). Obviously, some of the cadets had never read article number 69 or else Smith would never had to remind them of its prohibitions. Smith's order reminds us that not every cadet was a model student, even if there are few records to indicate so.

Of course, Smith was not foolish enough to believe that he could control the Institute without granting some enjoyment to the "inmates." Therefore, he decided to create elements in the formal curriculum that enabled the cadets to have some fun while also learning valuable

athletic skills. Order number 18, issued on December 7, 1840, states that "a Cadet is permitted to take lessons from Mr. Roberts in Boxing and Sword exercise" if he has paid his debts to the Treasurer of the Institute (Superintendent's Orders, 1840). These pursuits are hardly frivolous given the nature of VMI's mission, and Smith surely knew that most of the cadets would get some pleasure from them. In this way, what we see as part of the extracurriculum today Smith integrated into the formal curriculum by "permitting" the cadets to take such lessons and by requiring that they have paid tuition on time in order to enroll.

On July 5, 1842, the day after the first graduation ceremonies the new graduates of the Institute met to form the Alumni Military Association (Lexington Gazette, July 7, 1842, 1). This development certainly ensured that former cadets would continue to maintain an interest in the affairs of the Institute and also created the beginnings of institutional memory among the students. The body eventually changed its name to the VMI Alumni Association and in the preamble to its 1853 constitution left little doubt that former students were intent on following developments at the Institute: ". . .the Society of Alumni. . .is deeply interested in the prosperity of their Alma Mater and desirous of effecting something, in a body, towards her increased usefulness and renown. . ." (Superintendent's Report, June 22, 1854).

Perhaps as a way of fostering camaraderie and "school spirit" among the active corps, Smith allowed cadets to form a literary club, called the Society of Cadets, in early 1840. The Society was open to all cadets who wished to join and served as a popular literature and arts club--two of the subjects scarcely covered at VMI in 1840 (Couper, v. II 73-4). Within the parameters established by Smith, the Society seemed to foster an even greater institutional loyalty among the cadets. It held competitions for the best charcoal drawings of campus buildings and its members regularly wrote and spoke in French, thus complementing the French language requirement of the formal curriculum (74). By 1848, when the number of

cadets wishing to join the Society became too great for the club to admit all comers, Smith permitted the creation of another club, the Dialectic Society, dedicated to another skill important for college graduates in the nineteenth century--debate (73). Thus, both student clubs were fully sanctioned by the administration and both strove to complement elements in the formal curriculum.

Other than these two clubs and the boxing and fencing lessons, cadets were allowed few other out-of-class pleasures not directly related to the curriculum. When they took it upon themselves to invent fun on their own, they were strictly reprimanded by the administration. One such chastisement came in June of 1842 when Smith ordered that "Cadets are prohibited from swinging upon the chain fence and playing ball within the yard of the Institute" (Order, June 14, 1842, Superintendent's Orders, 1842). Even activities that would seem important to the development of student character and self-expression today were frowned upon by the morals-conscious Board of Visitors. For example, cadets were forbidden from conducting student plays and musicals, probably because of the association with licentiousness that theatre held for largely Protestant western Virginia (Order, October 8, 1847, Superintendent's Order Book, 1847).

This is not to say that the cadets did not enjoy some of the officially approved activities in which they were required to take part. In late summer of 1848, the cadets conducted field exercises away from the Institute, marching to nearby Hot Springs, Virginia, for what amounted to rest and relaxation. One cadet, Philip C. Gibbs, recorded the events of the trip. In his composition book, Gibbs writes of starting out early on August 29 from the Institute and marching "in heat that was almost killing" towards Alum Springs (near Lexington). After staying here for about three days, the cadets are invited to Warm Springs, in neighboring Bath County. According to Gibbs, the commanding officer was much more lax in his control over

the students than one might expect. On their night march to Warm Springs, Gibbs writes "we found it splendid marching, not to say romantic. . . Every one was in glorious spirits and it did one good, just to listen to the merry laugh which was heard, as the multitude of voices were distinguished chatting merrily and cracking jokes" (Composition Book of Cadet Philip C. Gibbs, Student Letters, 1851). Judging from Cadet Gibbs' language, the cadets were quite happy at their ability to leave the Institute on the march. Gibbs never mentions that the march was also intended as a means of initiating the cadets into the rigors of military life in the field, but it undoubtedly was.

We also find out from Gibbs that the cadets were well received along the way by people in the countryside who stopped to gawk at their military precision and that at Warm Springs, Dr. John Brockenbrough, (the same man who would deliver the speech on the laying of the barracks cornerstone in 1850) a federal judge and owner of the baths at Warm Springs, "had opened his baths free of charge to the cadets" (Gibbs' Composition Book). Obviously, the trip was intended as a public relations ploy for the Institute as well as providing field experience and adolescent release. Many of the visitors to Warm Springs were among the South's most famous citizens (Chesnut 91), a fact undoubtedly realized by Smith and the Board. The cadets drilled in dress uniforms each morning and Gibbs writes that "ladies smiled upon us, men praised us, and all said we were complete soldiers" (Gibbs' Composition Book). Brockenbrough gave a dinner in honor of the cadets on the last evening of their visit to the Springs and one visitor was so impressed with the cadets that he resolved to send his son to the Institute. The cadets were obviously popular lot, at least among the region's upper class who frequented the springs area, and one could argue that they themselves were seen as part of that upper class, honored by state officials and "smiled upon" by young ladies from Virginia's most famous families.

Thanks to another former cadet, George C. Chamberlaine, we also know something about the lives of cadets inside the Institute as well as on the march. In an article published in Virginia Military's annual, The Bomb, in 1896, Chamberlaine relates what the Institute was like in 1850. Perhaps most importantly, he notes that "at this time hazing did not amount to much. Indeed, the word itself was not known. A few jokes were played on 'plebes,' . . . but nothing was done to hurt them" (4). This information is important in that it reveals how few student-led and student-devised traditions existed at the Institute at this time. The "rat line" and other traditions were some years away; the student led "quizzing" of first year students that even today cadets and administrators view as essential to cultivating the VMI experience was not yet a component of student life. At least as late as 1850, then, VMI's student body still lacked the initiative to pass down customs and habits that instilled in new cadets a distinctive understanding about the Institute's mission and culture.

Nevertheless, there were some indications beginning around 1850 that the "natives were restless" and were perhaps taking the lack of extracurricular stimulus into their own hands. At the Board of Visitor's annual meeting in July 1850, the Board instructed Superintendent Smith to contact the parents of three cadets who had "absented themselves from the Institute without leave in defiance of authorities thereof. . ." (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 2, 1850). Then in 1851 a new occurrence signalled for the first time something of a spirit of activism among the cadets. In his history of Virginia Military, Smith writes that "our discipline was brought to a severe test by a rebellion in the corps of cadets in the spring of 1851" (F. Smith, VMI 145). While Smith was away from Lexington on a business trip, several of the cadets were allowed by acting superintendent Preston to attend the trial of a murderer in the local Circuit Court. At the very height of the trial, Preston refused to allow the cadets to attend the proceedings any longer than the three day permit he had originally granted them (145). Subsequently, the cadets went "a-w-o-l," attending the trial without

Preston's permission. Smith returned that day and Preston apprised him of the events. Smith promptly dismissed every cadet (nearly the entire first (senior) class) (146). He writes that "I could take no other view of the case than that of its being a direct resistance to lawful authority" (146). The cadets apologized and offered their regrets to Smith; but, it was the board that eventually reinstated them (147). Despite Smith's tough attitude toward the cadets and his strong disapproval of the students "folly" (147), one cannot help but notice that clemency was not long in coming. The students, while dealt with severely, probably knew that the if they left the Institute in sufficient numbers, the Board and Smith could hardly afford to expel all of them. And they were right! Moreover, note that they disobeyed orders while Smith was away. This in itself reveals the power that one man held over the entire institution. Nevertheless, the students had finally acted on their own volition and in direct disobedience of authority--and they seemed none the less harmed for the attempt. One can even say that this incident was the first chink in the administration's armor. After this point, the students began to exercise some control--albeit slight--over their own affairs.

In fact, we soon begin to see evidence of student dissension in a variety of "underground" forms. One of the most imaginative and even dangerous, given the strict prohibition on possessing literature not related to the official curriculum, was student poetry that ridiculed the administration. One anonymous bard wrote:

"Dark is the shade of the greenwood tree  
And sad the shade of the mountain glen.  
But sadder far for you, young men,  
Is the Board and Specks. Tough is he.  
Beware, young men, beware" (Student letter book 1853).

The cadet who wrote these lines obviously knew something about the authoritative, disciplinarian attitude that Superintendent Smith brought to his job. However, note also that the writer satirizes Smith by calling him "Specks" (Smith wore glasses). There may be respect



for the Colonel's "toughness," but there is also the latent ability to make fun of his appearance. The cadets were becoming bolder and subtler in their defiance to the administration and in so doing beginning to cultivate some nucleus of student life beyond officially sanctioned activities.

But even at the most critical events related to the Institute's mission, when the Superintendent had promulgated specific detailed orders about cadet behavior, problems could still arise. The Harper's Ferry/Charlestown expedition to guard John Brown provides a good example. On such an important exercise, critical to the Institute's relationship with state government, indeed the entire state, Smith wrote out orders telling the cadets even the precise way to stand at attention (Superintendent's Order Book, Order no. 2, November 28, 1859). Smith was taking few chances with the entire nation looking to his cadets to help guard John Brown. Still, the cadets had learned one valuable component about soldiering upon which Smith had not counted: drinking. On the day after Brown's hanging, December 3, 1859, Cadet J. B. Mosely was "discharged from duty. . .for being in a state of intoxication." (Superintendent's Order Book, Order no. 6, December 3, 1859). Mosely may have been sent packing, but his antics exemplified a growing willingness to indulge individual student whims.

For whatever reasons--fear of more student uprisings, cadet drunkenness, or simply to toughen the cadets in the face of war--Smith seems to have bought into the idea of cadet athletics by late 1860. In a letter to Howard Sawyer of Norfolk dated November 14, 1860, the Superintendent writes, "the bill of goods recently purchased of you have come to hand--all right--except the footballs [Smith's emphasis]. Three of them are. . .good for nothing and have. . .cuts in them" (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, 1860). The chances are good that football was to complement fencing, boxing, and riflery as part of the accepted, formal curriculum, especially in light of the war clouds gathering on the horizon. In any event, this

is the first time that any activity we associate today with the extracurricular component of colleges made an appearance at VMI.

But, of course, even by 1860 VMI was not a college in the traditional sense of the word. The students were beginning to organize themselves into a cohesive group with some voice on campus and to question the authority of the faculty and administration, but there is little evidence that they bought into the VMI mission with anything like the enthusiasm that characterized the faculty and certainly the superintendent. One is left with the distinct impression that while the cadets were proud of their status as military students, they felt no real loyalty or irrational affinity for the Institute as a whole. Virginia Military simply did not evoke an emotional response within their hearts and minds, primarily because Smith and the Board did not permit them to establish their own individualized ties--traditions, customs, rituals--to the school's mission. Until that time, they would remain as the critical "missing link" to VMI's existence as a distinctive college.

### **Community Relations**

Virginia Military was extremely careful to uphold the best possible reputation within the Lexington/Rockbridge County area because it needed local support to bolster its relationship with the State legislature. If common citizens in the area were displeased with the Institute--for whatever reason--they might pressure their state representatives to withdraw funding, and few legislators would be willing to ignore their constituents, even to save the commonwealth's military academy. Moreover, as an institution enveloped by the traditions, customs, and mores of the Old South, VMI's leadership (namely, Francis Smith), knew that the young men they were training were required to uphold and to conform to community standards. This was a critical component of their initiation into honorable manhood. In fact,

as Wyatt-Brown writes, "at the heart of honor. . .there lies the evaluation of the public" (Honor and Violence 14); "honor was accorded on the basis of community decision" (61). So, to gain honor, the cadets had little choice but to get along with the community at large and the school itself, in controlling the actions of these same cadets, was compelled to do the same. In compromising with the community, then, VMI was also contributing to its perpetuation of the honor code as a central element in its mission. This section will primarily concern incidents where the Institute revealed this strong desire to gain the approbation of the community and incidents of controversy where the Superintendent and the Board of Visitors or cadets disagree with members of the community.

The first of these incidents occurred in July of 1841, when Smith considered some of the cloth for cadet uniforms, bought from local merchants, to be of inferior quality (F. Smith, VMI 71-2). Smith told the Board of this development at the annual meeting in July and the Board decided that "if at any time, in the opinion of the Principal Professor, there should be either a deficiency in the quantity or quality of the materials, or the process should be, in his opinion, excessive, that then he should take measures . . .to procure the clothing in some other form" (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 10, 1841). This is precisely what Smith proceeded to do. The superintendent bought materials from out of town and sold them to the cadets on his own. Consequently, the merchants sued Smith and the Institute for selling goods without a license (F. Smith, VMI 74). Smith retained Judge John Brockenbrough and Delegate C.P. Dorman as counsel and, predictably, the local Circuit Court judge found in favor of the Institute (74). There were few other troubles with the merchants in the future. This one particular episode seems to have established the guidelines by which the town and the Institute dealt with each other from then on. As long as the town treated the Institute fairly there was little controversy. But if the Institute felt it was treated poorly by the town, it would not hesitate to use its position within the state to safeguard its interests.

By 1845, VMI was beginning to have a falling out with another community institution, Washington College. Owing to the increasing amount of liberal studies at the Institute, Washington College complained to the state general assembly in early 1845 that the Institute was purposely competing with the College and that the Institute was teaching courses outside the parameters of its strictly military mission (Couper, v.I 140-41). On July 3, 1845, the VMI Board of Visitors resolved that "a committee be appointed to learn from the authorities of Washington College what is their understanding of the arrangements made between that College and this Institute" (Board of Visitors Minutes). A scant two days later, the Board had its reply:

"An official communication from the Board of Trustees of Washington College as to the July 3, 1845 communication having been made by this Board, replies that from the 22nd of February next, the apportionment heretofore made of them for the military professor of the Institute shall cease. . .thereby severing the connexion between the College and the Military Institute" (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 5, 1845).

With the always tedious collaboration between the two schools ended forever. A few Washington alumni attacked Smith anonymously in the Lexington Gazette, but as Smith writes in his annual report, VMI's "character as a seminary of learning has not been assailed. . .no one has been bold enough to assail the character of the school. . ." (Superintendent's Report, June 30, 1845). But Washington College also had powerful allies in the legislature and the General Assembly soon began debate on whether to move VMI to either Alexandria or Winchester (Lyle 107-8). At this point, the citizens of Lexington convened to show their support for the Institute at a meeting attended by local politicians and state legislators. In the end, the legislature decided not to act on the proposed move; the town of Lexington, never entirely endeared to a military presence in its midst, saved the Institute! (Lyle 107-8). The school's honor had escaped injury again in the public arena, thanks largely to the public itself.

Another aspect of community life in the antebellum South with which the Institute contended was duelling. Wyatt-Brown writes that "although the occasions for duels differed somewhat, almost all arose because one antagonist cast doubt on the manliness and bearing of the other. . ." (Honor and Violence 152). We know from the Regulations of the Virginia Military Institute, 1839-45 that dueling or "promoting" fight was expressly forbidden by the Institute's regulations (17). Unfortunately, this was not always a sufficient deterrent.

One incident in particular served to illustrate just how deadly serious many southern white males took the issue of honor and how easily extreme violence could be promoted by and excused by the community when one's honor was offended. In his annual report of June 30, 1854, Smith recounted the murder of Cadet Thomas Blackburn at the hands of a man named Christian. According to Smith, Christian was a stranger in Lexington who was attending a law class taught by Judge John Brockenbrough. He soon asked a young woman in the town if he could escort her to church on Sunday; the young woman subsequently told her cousin, Cadet Blackburn. Blackburn went to Christian, explaining to him that his cousin did not wish to see him. Christian seemed to understand and held no malice against Blackburn. However, when Christian's law classmates heard of the meeting, they chastised Christian for letting Blackburn get the better of him and encouraged him to challenge Blackburn to a duel. Christian went to meet Blackburn at church, and, inducing him back into the street, stabbed him to death. Christian was arrested, tried for murder and, amazingly, acquitted! (Superintendent's Annual Report, June 30, 1854). A local school teacher from Connecticut, Giles Gunn, summed up the entire event in a sarcastic letter to his sister: "'You see how nice a sense of honor the Southerners have. In law here if one man calls another a liar and he beats him almost to death for it, the law does nothing with him for it is considered sufficient provocation'" (Couper, v.I 145). In point of fact, that is precisely what happened: the community acquitted Christian of murder because it felt he had taken proper action in light

of Blackburn's sabotage of his relationship with a young woman and his subsequent embarrassment before the community. The Institute lived by the honor code as dictated by antebellum southern society. It seemed that certain members of its student body were destined to die by it as well.

By the following year, a new wrinkle had appeared in the growing rivalry between Washington College and the Institute. VMI had always held its commencement ceremonies on July 4. Washington College now proposed to hold its exercises on July 3, thus making preparations for VMI's graduation all but impossible, given the proximity of the two schools (they are but twenty-five yards apart). W.B. Taliaferro, President of the Board of Visitors at that time, wrote to the Washington College Board of Visitors explaining the dilemma and requesting that "they adopt some other day than the 3rd or 4th of July for their commencement celebration--the 2nd of July would in no respect interfere with us" (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 3, 1855). Since this letter was written on the day before Virginia Military's commencement, we can safely conclude that it was written in anger--despite the writer's polite tone. Also, the letter reveals that VMI feels secure enough in the higher education marketplace to challenge an older, more mainstream college on an issue as important as setting a commencement date. In any event, Washington was not willing to comply with the Institute's desires--in fact, the Board of Trustees never replied to Taliaferro's letter (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 3, 1855). As a result, VMI was eventually forced to change the date of its annual commencement, a decision that fueled the growing animosity between the two institutions.

Thus, VMI's community relations were chiefly predicated on upholding the school's good name in the community and standing up for itself in the face of what it considered unfair situations. However, it did little to take an active role in the community. Note that in every

instance where the school found itself dealing with Lexington residents it never initiated the contact. The community came to the school uninvited and while VMI may have treated its neighbors respectfully and was careful to meet community standards, it made sure to distance itself from Lexington. After all, VMI was a state school--not locally controlled--with a mission that took it outside western Virginia. To pursue too much activity with the locals might have forced the Institute to choose between service to the state and service to the community. In the wake of strong state support, Smith and the Board had no desire to make such a choice.

### **Architecture and Facilities**

As Thelin and Yankovich note in their study of campus architecture, "we expect the campus to be a distinctive place whose architecture is at once historic and monumental--a source of pride and affiliation" (57). The architecture of VMI during the years 1840 to 1860 may not have fulfilled community expectations in quite the same manner that these authors have in mind, but it certainly gave the Institute a sense of difference, if not distinctiveness, from other colleges (including Washington College) and a definite "affiliation" with its individual mission. In many ways, too, the development of Virginia Military's architecture throughout the nineteenth century mirrors the school's historical development from a newly formed military academy reliant on buildings from the Lexington Arsenal, to a better organized military academy with a specific type of architecture, and finally to a distinctive college in its own right, complete with facilities that help relate the VMI saga in "bricks and mortar" (Thelin and Yankovich 57).

Smith tells us that in the first years of the Institute's existence, the school was forced to rely solely on the buildings of the Arsenal as both cadet barracks and classrooms (Superintendent's Report, June 30, 1854). Additionally, the Arsenal had constructed six log

cabins which now served as cadet barracks as well (Superintendent's Report). We get a better picture of the VMI campus in that first year from Cadet Edmund Pendleton, who wrote of his experience at the Institute in the 1896 issue of the Institute's annual, The Bomb:

"The buildings, as they were occupied by the Old State Guard, consisted of a barracks of brick, two stories high, and an Arsenal four stories high, also of brick containing boxes packed with flint lock muskets and rifles, cartridge boxes and 'pipe clay' leather belts. The buildings were enclosed by a brick wall and the windows of the barracks were securely defended by stout iron bars. . .The present parade ground was partly under cultivation as a corn-field, intersected by 'worm fences' and unoccupied by any buildings except a few log cabins. . .There was no professor's house as yet constructed; except a brick house built for the superintendent, Major Smith, which stood at the west end of the barracks, with its gable fronting southward" ( Pendleton 3).

Indeed, between Smith and Pendleton, we get the impression that the Institute's early campus looked for all the world like a "prison" (F. Smith, VMI 52). This facade, in its own way, represented the expectations that the State had for the Institute at this time--mostly military. But the old guard barracks and the overall military atmosphere also gave the Institute a legacy from its forerunner, the Arsenal, that the Institute would modify and subsume into its own architecture in years to come; after all, the Institute still looks much like a fortress even today.

Through lobbying the state general assembly for funds, Smith was gradually able to add a few buildings to the campus physical plant during the first decade of the Institute's operation (Lyle 106). Couper details that at least five new buildings were added between 1840 and 1847, including the superintendent's quarters, a combination gun shed and library, and a small barracks unit that also housed the Institute's hospital (v.I, 163). The original arsenal still served as the classroom space and as the cadet barracks, although a new wing had been added to serve as cadet quarters (163). These buildings, designed to be functional, were rather nondescript, although they kept an element of the old arsenal's neo-gothic facade. By 1847, though, the number of applicants to the Institute made plain the desperate need for a new



barracks (Lyle 106). Philip St. George Cocke, a member of the Board of Visitors, was also something of an amateur architect, and he planned for "an adequate and tasteful design for the future extension of the buildings" that would provide a campus of "distinctive architectural excellence and taste." (Cocke to Smith, July 26, 1848, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1848). Cocke had grand visions for VMI. In a letter to Smith dated February 15, 1849, he gave VMI the nickname it has carried ever since, a title that clarifies the linkage of its mission to its heritage: "the West Point of the South" (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1849).

First, though, "the West Point of the South" needed a new barracks. Smith and the Board commissioned the firm of Town and Davis to draw up plans for the new barracks, which was to be neo-Gothic (Lyle 107). Since VMI finally settled the rift with Washington College and had a strong commitment from the local community for its continued presence, the general assembly appropriated \$46,000 for the new barracks, two new professors houses, a lot to extend the parade ground, and an additional twenty-five acres of land for field exercises (Acts, 1850; Couper, v.I 213). The process of tearing down the old barracks and building a new one was a slow one--it took several years (Lyle 109). In the meantime, the General Assembly appropriated an additional \$20,000 for the erection of an mess hall (Acts, 1854). Davis also designed the new "Executive Mansion"--that Royster Lyle, in his article on VMI architecture, notes was the architect's "crowning touch for the VMI design. It complemented his design for the Institute's building group, all with battlements, cremisated turrets, and towers. . ." (110). The mansion was never completed but three sides of the quadrangular barracks as well as *three new faculty residences were finished before the war* (Lyle 110).

Now, with its fortress-type campus, the Institute had indeed become the "West Point of the South," contributing an imposing martial appearance to its ability to train military

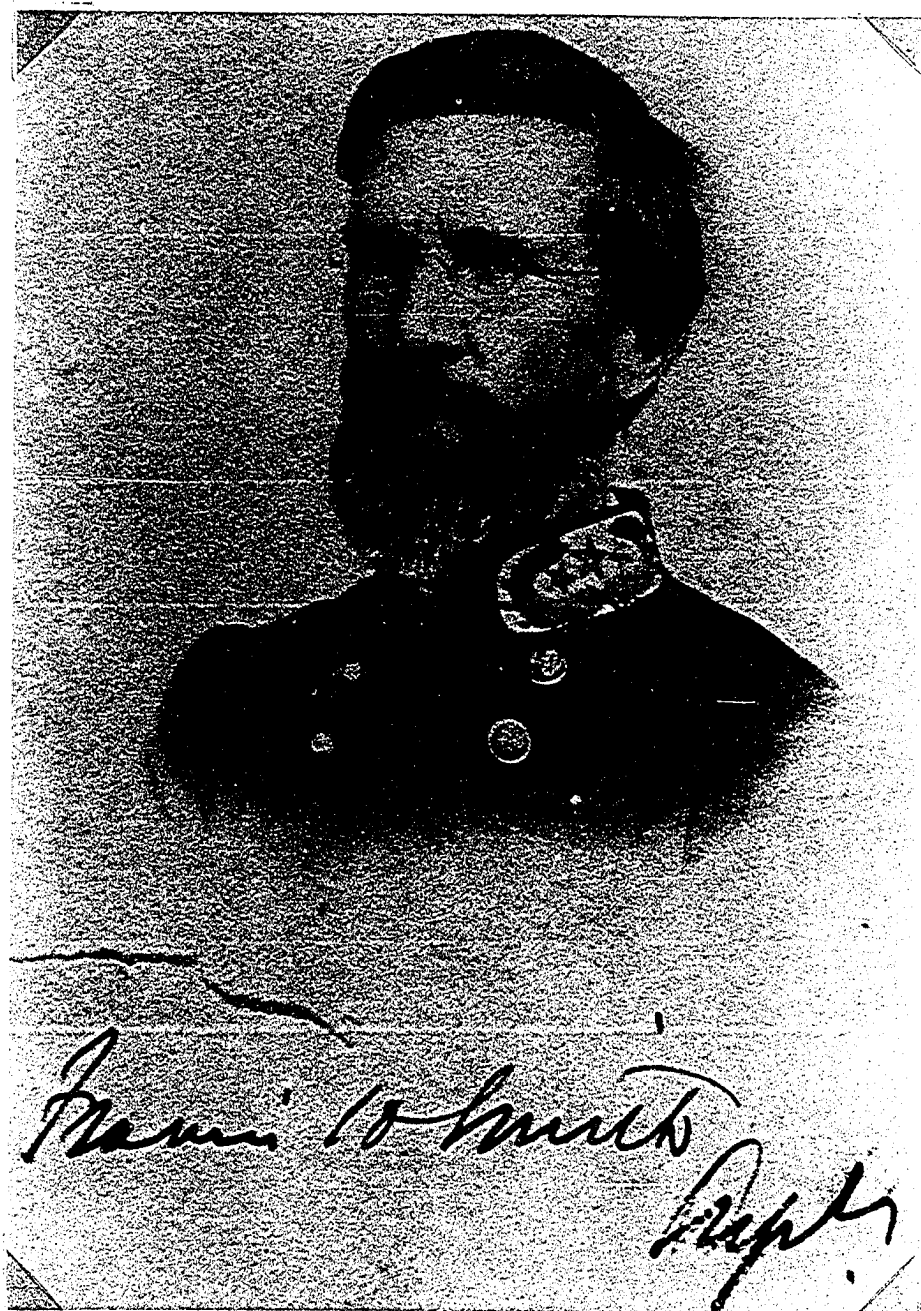
leaders for Virginia and the South. With the addition of a host of new buildings, all designed within Smith and Cocke's carefully conceived framework, VMI now possessed a campus that represented well its mission and that differentiated it from almost every other school in the nation (Lyle 107). But the life of the new campus was a short-lived one. Unfortunately, five years later, this combination fortress/college would also attract the attention of marauding Federal troops who would leave it a smoldering ruin.

### **Conclusion**

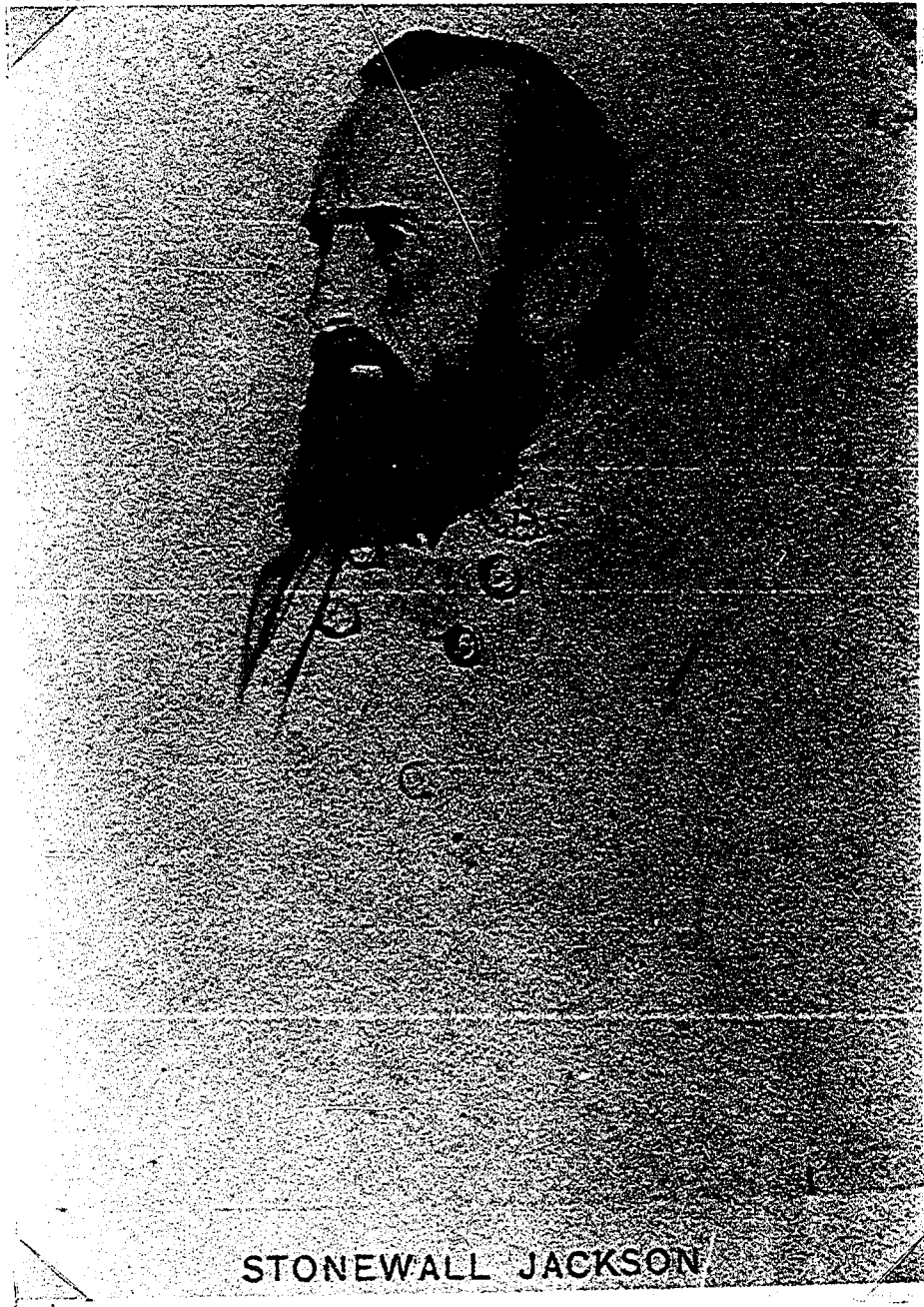
But in December of 1860 this event was another few years away. Virginia was still in the Union and there were many prominent Virginians who held little sympathy for their seceding brethren to the South. All in all, 1840 to 1860 was an extremely successful period for VMI, perhaps as successful as one could expect for a new institution with such an unusual mission. One must attribute most of this success to Francis Smith, who despite several different Boards of Visitors and stiff competition from a neighboring and well-established college, was able to implement his vision of Virginia Military and to establish strong external support, strong faculty support, and to ensure a malleable student body willing to accept his administrative authority. In the preceding 21 years, Virginia Military had become something akin to the commonwealth's first polytechnical institute, offering agriculture courses, liberal arts courses, engineering courses, and military science courses. And, as a result of the Institute's ability to fulfill its mission so thoroughly, the school subsequently found itself hand-in-hand with the government in Richmond. As military affairs became more and more important in the capital, so too did VMI.

This popularity, though, meant that VMI now entertained certain responsibilities that other, more tradition colleges would never encounter. The state (and by this I mean both government and the citizenry) had helped found the Institute, had helped to mould its mission,

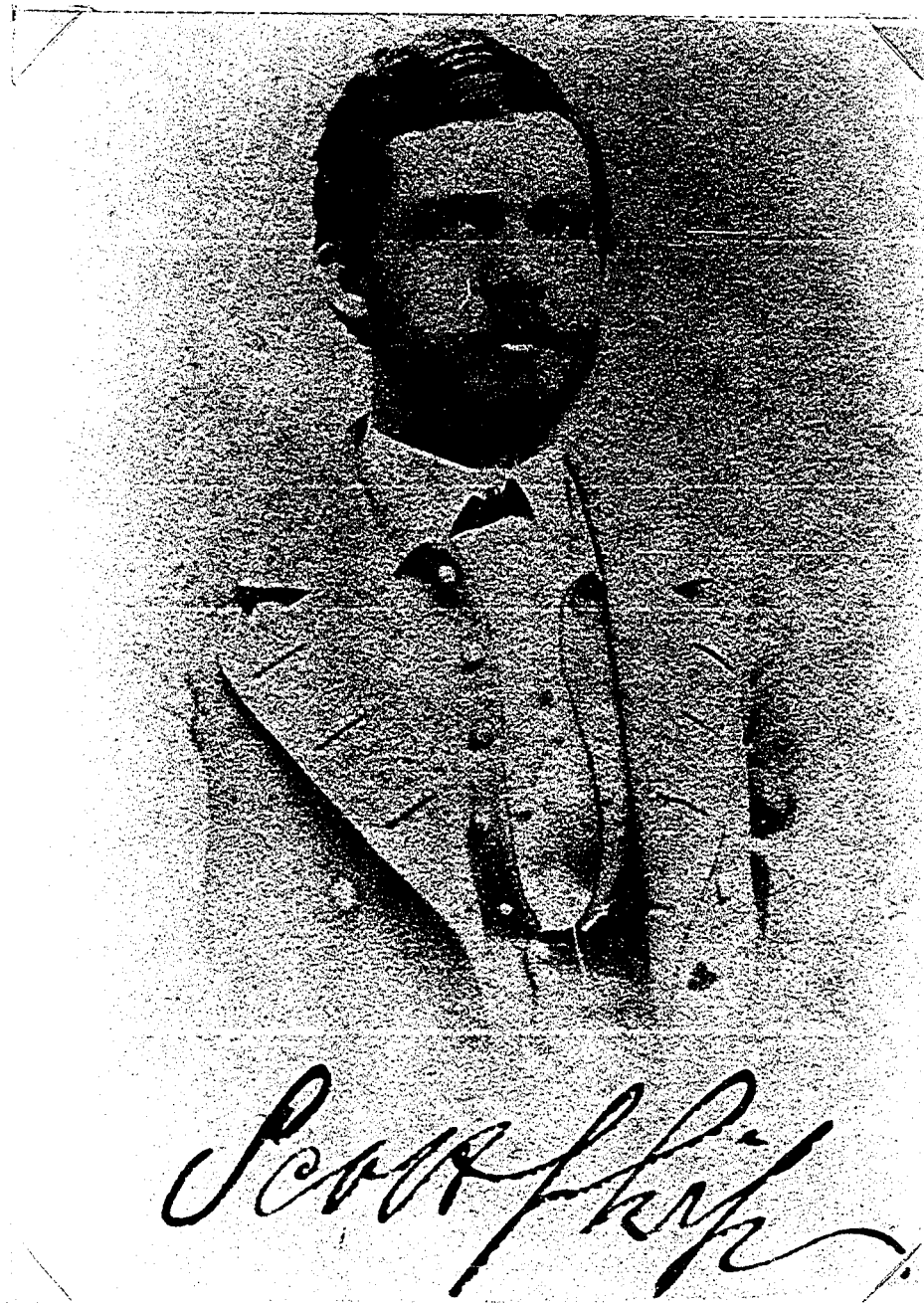
and had lent a hand when the administration needed occasional help in interpreting this mission to its fullest extent. In so doing, VMI's mission took on socio-cultural elements indigenous to the state and to the larger culture of the antebellum South of which Virginia was a part. Now, with secession and war only months away, the Institute would soon become directly embroiled, as an institution, in a conflict central to the existence of both Virginia and the South. John Brockenbrough had ended his 1850 speech at VMI with a fear of just such a development: "God grant that this last severe test of the value of the 'Virginia Military Institute' may not be reserved for her in the dark womb of the future!" (18). His fears were about to become reality.







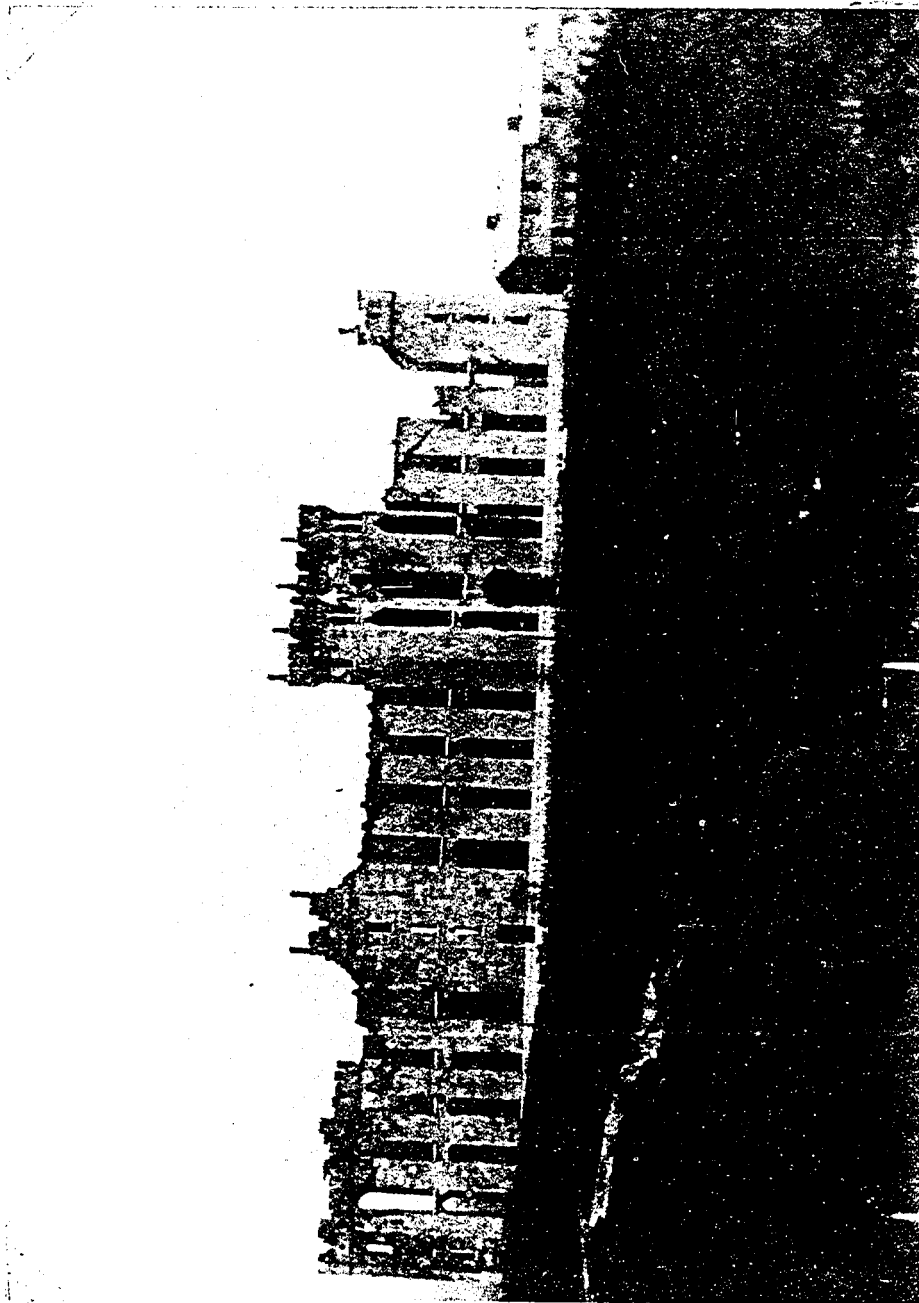
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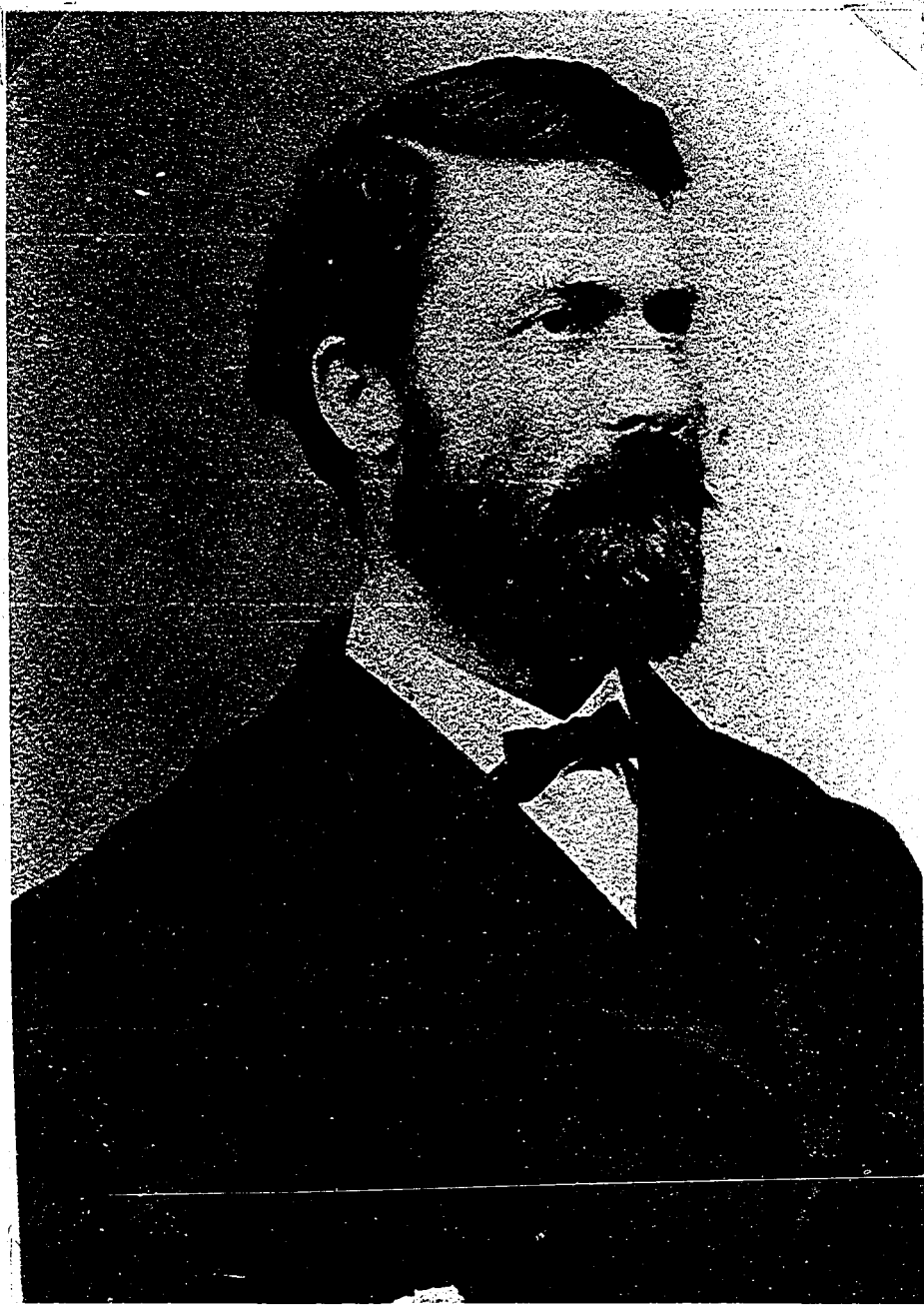












#### CHAPTER FOUR: CLAIMING A PLACE IN HISTORY--1861 TO 1865

"The South is obviously American as well as Southern and the first test of distinctiveness lies in the establishment of a departure from the American norm" (Woodward, Burden xii). This statement sums up succinctly the impact the American Civil War had upon the American South--it gave the region a different "collective experience" (16), one of "frustration, failure, and defeat" (19). Perhaps more than any other college or school in the South, Virginia Military played a direct role in events that culminated in this unique "collective experience." And, perhaps more importantly for purposes here, the war affected the Institute in ways that it affected no other educational institution: it gave VMI distinction as the only college or university to fight as a single organizational unit and ensured the eventual existence, in the years after 1865, of a clearly defined institutional saga that strengthened this feeling of distinctiveness. In short, the Civil War allowed VMI to claim a unique place in American history.

Writing of the development of distinctiveness among colleges, Burton Clark notes that the faculty, a unique curriculum, external forces, students, and an institutional ideology leading to the realization of saga create and perpetuate distinctiveness (246). Prior to the Civil War, VMI had already achieved the first three of these components; the war, via the Institute's actions related to its prosecution by the South, was to provide the fourth--student acceptance of the institutional credo. In the years just after the war, these four components combined with a newly established institutional ideology to form a saga--VMI's own

"historically based, somewhat embellished understanding of a unique organizational development" (235)--and to foster true distinctiveness.

In VMI's case, this "unique organizational development" was reinforced by institutional involvement in several forays of the Confederate army, including one, New Market, where ten cadets were killed, and by the destruction of the Institute by Federal forces in June 1864. These two events, New Market and the burning of the Institute, are the seminal events in the Institute's history even to this day and are the events that shaped most VMI's institutional saga and distinctiveness. Clark notes that "colleges are prone to a remembrance of things past and a symbolism of uniqueness. The more special the history or the more forceful the claim to a place in history, the more intensely cultivated are the ways of sharing memory and symbolizing the institution" (254). If this is the case, then VMI's closeness to the Confederate cause, the Confederate government, and to events central to the war gives it a "claim to a place in history" rivalled by few if any colleges and universities.

### **Hypothesis**

Between 1861 and 1865, national events involving Virginia and the South, entities to which the Institute's mission was tied, led the Institute, through its application of mission, into direct involvement in the American Civil War. This institutional involvement, represented best by the cadets' role at the Battle of New Market (May 15, 1864) and by the burning of the Institute by Union troops (June 12, 1864), provided Virginia Military with a unique place among American colleges and universities. In turn, this unique "claim to a place in history" (Clark 254) became the critical concept that insured the eventual creation of institutional distinctiveness borne from a commonly understood, verifiable institutional saga. The war gave Virginia Military its own substantive history, different from, yet tethered to that of Virginia and southern culture.

## **Organization and Sources**

This chapter seeks to convey the nature of Virginia Military's links to important people and events of the Civil War in five aspects of the Institute's operations: government relations, academic affairs, student affairs, community relations, and architecture and facilities. Each of these five sections, in turn, progresses chronologically, tracing VMI's involvement in these events and with important politicians and military leaders. It also provides a portrait of the institutional chronology that would later allow it to cultivate its new found institutional saga and to claim distinctiveness.

Unfortunately, representing the Institute's involvement in the War becomes problematic at some points with regard to primary sources. When federal troops burned the campus in 1864, many important records were lost, including the Institute's Order Book, which contained copies of the Superintendent's orders to the cadets for the period from May 1864 to the end of the war. As a result, most all superintendent's orders for May 1864 through 1865 quoted in this chapter have been drawn from Jennings Wise's Military History of the Virginia Military Institute, 1839 to 1865. Wise, writing in 1915, was able to access many of these missing orders from individuals who retained them. These individuals are long since deceased and the orders' whereabouts are currently unknown. Given Wise's accuracy in the documentation of other primary sources still available, one may find him trustworthy in his transcription of these orders from the original manuscripts.

## **Government Relations**

VMI's relationship with the Virginia state government had always been a strong one. However, with the advent of secession and the subsequent war with the North, VMI found itself dealing with two governments in Richmond: the state government and the newly formed government of the Confederate States of America. Since Virginia government was preoccupied

with assisting the national government in the war effort, VMI naturally came to be viewed as a resource in that effort. In this way, the Institute soon found itself near the forefront of the South's struggle with the North and often in the midst of situations that were to become critical to the Confederate cause.

Virginia's role during the scant months after the firing on Fort Sumter in April 1861 and the Battle of First Bull Run in August, was made plain by Governor John Letcher, who, in response to Lincoln's call for troops to quash the rebellion, wrote that "since Lincoln had chosen to inaugurate civil war, he would be sent no troops from the Old Dominion. The people of the commonwealth are freemen, not slaves" (Foote, v.I 51-2). Virginia, now part of the Confederacy, would fight along side her southern neighbors against the Union. As the state's official military school, Virginia Military was placed squarely in the fray.

The Institute's first connection with the swiftly escalating war preparations came early on, long before the actual outbreak of hostilities on Virginia soil. On April 17, 1861, four days after Ft. Sumter, Smith received a letter from Adjutant General William H. Richardson ordering him to report to Richmond: "The Governor requests that you will come here as soon as you possibly can. He wants your counsel and advice particularly" (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1861). Upon arriving in Richmond, Smith found that he had been appointed a member of the "Council of Three," who would advise the Governor on how best to handle the impending crisis. (F. Smith, VMI 178). Thus, even at this stage, the Institute's executive officer was playing a vital role in setting policy for the entire state relative to a national crisis. This was to be the first of many instances where VMI would be called upon to serve state government and later the Confederate government in critical, emergency situations.

The Council of Three ended up proposing, among other things, the creation of a "Camp of Instruction for the troops in the vicinity of Richmond" and suggested that "the cadets go down at once to drill the volunteers as they came in" (F.Smith, VMI 179). Smith writes that "Camp Lee was accordingly organized, Col. William Gilham [a VMI faculty member] placed in command of it, and orders were sent by express messenger to Lexington for the cadets to be sent down under the command of Maj. T.J. Jackson" (179). In this way, the cadets themselves, indeed, almost the entire Institute, had become involved in training and preparing Virginia's recruits for war. VMI's mission of training officers for the militia now found new meaning: cadets themselves were training the soldiers they would one day command on the field of battle. The Institute was not just providing leadership indirectly in the form of future officers, but directly, in the form of drill instruction for recruits. Virginia Military had already become an integral part of Virginia's war effort.

Moreover, Smith had made sure to remind the cadets of the magnitude of their responsibilities to Virginia in his order to move the corps to Richmond. He implored the young men to prove their "birth and breeding and exhibit to Virginia the worth of her favorite Institute. . . in this holy cause" (Order No. 63, April 21, 1861, Superintendent's Orders, 1857-1864). Through such language, Smith gives the modern scholar some glimpse into the emotions and sensibilities that motivated both faculty and students in the ensuing war: family name and honor, pride in the name of the organization with which they were affiliated, and the belief in the divinity of the southern cause. If there were any real doubts among those in the state at the time as to where Smith's loyalties lay, they were certainly put to rest by this order. Moreover, we know from Smith's pseudo-autobiographical Virginia Military Institute: Its Building and Rebuilding, that the Superintendent hardly took lightly the measure of his words concerning the role of the Institute. Looking back from some twenty years hence, he wrote that with the probability of civil war, "the Virginia Military Institute was now called



upon to fulfil the mission for which it had been so earnestly preparing" (181). At this stage of the Institute's development, then, there is little doubt that aiding its home state in a time of military crisis was VMI's chief responsibility. Smith was committed to ensuring a strategic military role for VMI within Virginia and later within the whole of the Confederacy.

To this end, the corps arrived in Richmond with no lack of fanfare. The April 24, 1861, edition of the Richmond Daily Examiner covered their wartime debut in the capitol: "This finely disciplined corps of youths deservedly the pride of the State, reached Richmond on Monday night, and were quartered at the Fair Grounds. . .Yesterday they paid their compliments to Governor Letcher. . ." (1). Of course, as a Lexingtonian and good friend of Superintendent Smith, John Letcher was likewise a friend of the Institute and thus more than willing to help the Institute gain good press--both for its own public relations with the power brokers in the legislature and for showing the citizenry that Virginia was in capable military hands. In either case, this Richmond "fieldtrip," like those in years past, gave the Institute a chance to crow about its use to the state. In this instance, though, the time in Richmond was to lead to more than just strengthened school ties with government and with the southern cause--it was the precursor to first-hand participation in the making of history.

VMI's first real link with immortality came when one of its faculty, Thomas J. Jackson, the commander of the troops at Camp Lee and professor of natural philosophy, was chosen to lead the Virginia volunteers at Harper's Ferry. His choice, coming simultaneously with that of Robert E. Lee to head all Virginia forces, (Couper, v. II 111) and its eventual impact on the Institute cannot be overemphasized. For, with "Stonewall" Jackson's fame at F i r s t Manassas (Bull Run) in September of 1861, the Institute had begun its own etching on the history books and, with it, a perception of its own historical worth. However, the real impact of Jackson's heroic exploits and their idealization within the ongoing romanticization of the

southern cause was not to take full shape until his death in May 1863. In late April 1861, Jackson was simply another state officer, albeit a high ranking one (colonel) with responsibility for Virginia's frontiers. His choice for military service away from the Institute signalled yet again VMI's military importance.

Within a few weeks, the cadets were requested for military service with Jackson. In writing to Colonel Smith, R.E. Lee notes that "Colonel Jackson desires me to send to him all the cadets that can be spared from Rich'd to aid in instructing his men. I must refer the disposition of the cadets to you. They are wanted everywhere. . ." (Lee to Smith, May 10, 1861, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1861). Smith ended up sending only ten cadets to Jackson along with a few of his faculty/staff, including the commandant, J.T.L. Preston (Couper, v.II 106-109). Since the wartime emergency had virtually suspended all academic activities as of April 1861, Smith was understandably reluctant to portion off large numbers of the corps for military service. In using his own discrepancy to determine the "disposition of the cadets," Smith reveals the first in a series of successful attempts to keep the corps together as a collegiate unit. Whether intending to do so or not, these efforts kept alive the idea of the Institute as a single, organizational entity throughout the war and ensured the development of a strong association between the events in which the cadets were involved and the Institute's own organizational history. VMI would remain a single military/academic unit during the entirety of the war and thus better its chances of surviving after the war; for this, the Institute has Smith alone to thank. Indeed, while Smith's loyalty to Virginia and to the South were unquestionable, his commitment to VMI's survival was unconquerable and when the two seemed at odds (as they would from time to time), Smith's organizational loyalty usually won out.

In the meantime, Smith's own responsibilities to state government took him away from the everyday operations of the Institute yet again. After the dissolution of the Council of Three in July 1861, Smith was ordered to Norfolk, where he was to serve as a colonel of artillery in the state militia (F. Smith, VMI 182). Since the Institute suspended all academic activities until January 1862, Smith was to remain on full-time active duty status with the militia until that date, thus reinforcing the notion that the superintendent served at the state's discretion. Smith's annual report to the legislature, dated July 15, 1861, reveals just how greatly the turbulent political times were affecting the Institute: "The disorganized condition of the Institute, resulting from the fact that most of the officers and cadets are now in the field, forbids the usual report in detail of the operations of the Institute during the past year" (Superintendent's Annual Report, 1861). And indeed, between April 1861 and January 1862, the Institute as an academic institution existed in name only--the students, faculty, and administration were, in point of fact, nothing short of state military conscripts.

With the burgeoning of hostilities during the late summer and early fall of 1861, state government began to see the Institute as part of a possible line of defense in the Shenandoah Valley rather than simply as additional manpower. In this respect, state officials again saw the usefulness of the corps as a single military unit and sanctioned the reopening of official academic activities at the Institute on January 1, 1862 (Couper, v.II 137). Cadets and faculty reported for class as usual, but the atmosphere was decidedly different, owing to the threat of Union invasion from down the Valley. On orders from the Governor, the cadets were held in a constant state of readiness for military action. They were not kept waiting for long.

On April 30, 1862, Smith received an order, couched in the form of a plea from "Stonewall" Jackson, to "please march the cadets at once to Staunton, if you feel authorized to cooperate in an important movement which I will explain to you when we meet"

(Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1862). Jackson was busy attempting to repel the advance down the Valley by Union General Fremont (Boatner 741-42). This order, coming from a faculty member of the Institute, must have seemed a strange role reversal for Smith. Nevertheless, he responded by issuing order number 46 on May 1, 1862, authorizing Major Scott Ship, commandant (military coordinator) of the cadets, to march the corps to Staunton. Smith was understandable nervous about this situation, especially since he had never received direct authorization from the state's adjutant general, William Richardson, for the cadets use in the Valley campaign. As a result, Smith made clear in his order that he wanted "no cadet to accompany the command, except those who feel that they go with the consent of their parents, either presumed or actual" (Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64). Using 15 year old cadets for training exercises was one thing; placing them in the potential line of enemy fire was quite another. And indeed, Smith's fears were well-founded: after Ship reached Staunton, Smith received word from Richardson in Richmond disapproving the corps participation with Jackson's command. He immediately wired Jackson with the development:

"on reaching Staunton with the corps of cadets, I reported my arrival to the Adjutant-General of Virginia, and regret to find that presumed authority which I had supposed that I received from that officer, had been misunderstood. . . the Board was unanimous in their 'disapprobation of the cadets being in any way subjected to the risk of battle unless in the immediate defense of Lexington. . . ' the view taken by the Board is based upon the idea 'that it would be a breach of good faith on the part of the institution towards parents and guardians. . .'" (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, May 6, 1862).

For Smith, Richardson's communication clarified for the moment how the Institute's Board and state officials perceived the school's role in the war effort: as a defense of Lexington and as a military school--not just a military unit. At least at this point, VMI's cadets were still seen as students too young to take part in active conflict. By taking this "academic" view of the Institute's mission, the Board reinforced Smith's ability to keep alive VMI's unique academic/military mission even during wartime. However, Jackson's plea had set a precedent; the army would call upon the cadets several more times in the coming years, thus placing the

corps squarely in the middle of Confederate Valley campaign strategy on an ongoing basis. Moreover, as the circumstances in the Valley became more desperate, Smith interpreted the state's charge to VMI to defend the state's arsenal at Lexington less and less strictly. By Spring 1864, defending Lexington would mean marching some 60 miles to New Market and helping to repulse yet another Union advance.

Although "Stonewall" Jackson's attempts at getting the corps to support his efforts in the Valley fell through, he nevertheless employed several VMI alumni in his officer corps. The number of VMI men in the Confederate Army of the Shenandoah was so great that Jackson paid homage to their presence at the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863 when he announced to his troops that "the Institute will be heard from today" (Couper, v. II 170). Jackson's words revealed yet another aspect of the Institute's role in the Civil War--alumni who served in the Confederate Army. These men would constitute a link between VMI and the major battles of the war. For example, the number of VMI men in strategic positions at Gettysburg in July 1863 borders on the astounding. Of the 15 regiments that took part in Pickett's Charge, 13 were commanded by VMI alumni (Couper, v. II 199-200). In Intruder in the Dust, William Faulkner describes the minutes before Pickett's Charge as the time when southern society and the Confederacy stood at its pinnacle, with all to win or all to lose riding on the outcome of the charge (190-91). If this was indeed the case, then the "Institute was heard from" on that day as well. Alongside the fate of Virginia and the South on "that July afternoon in 1863" (Faulkner 190) stood alumni from Virginia Military Institute, casting their own fates with that of the South and the Confederate Army. With events of this magnitude tied to VMI's wartime experience, the development of institutional distinctiveness tied to a unique historical saga became a greater possibility.

#### Averell's Raids

By August 1863, however, events were conspiring to bring the Institute back into the war. The Federals were again on the move in the Valley and again the Confederate commander, W.L. "Mudwall" Jackson (a cousin of the now deceased "Stonewall" Jackson) asked for reinforcements from Lexington, both from the Institute and from the Lexington militia units (J. Wise 236). General William Averell, under the command of Fremont, planned a series of raids in the Shenandoah in hopes of capturing the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad station in Salem, Virginia, and seriously interrupting communication lines to the South (Couper, v.II 208). This time, Smith felt compelled to use his own judgement in "defending Lexington" by granting Jackson's request. He issued special order number 155 on August 25, 1863, sending "four detachments of cadets to man four pieces of artillery. . ." and "two companies of cadets [to act] as infantry support. . ." (Superintendent's Orders, 1857-1864). Upon reaching Goshen, Virginia, northwest of Lexington, Acting Commandant Captain W.E. Cutshaw was told that the cadets would act only as reinforcements for Jackson's men in the event of a pitched battle ( J.Q.A. Nadenbousch to W.E. Cutshaw, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, August 25, 1863). The corps first real activity as a single military unit ended in this rather inglorious way. Averell was repulsed without the aid of the corps--temporarily, at least.

After this second affair in which Smith felt required to send out the corps to help in the defense of the Valley, the Superintendent wrote to Adjutant-General Richardson to request assistance in deciding precisely where a "defense of Lexington" should occur:

"And now, while matters are taking the direction of greater pressure from the enemy, I should be pleased to receive specific directions from the Governor, and Board of Visitors, and Adjutant-General, as to my duty in these emergencies crowding as they do upon us, to a moment of panic. I want to do my whole duty, but before doing it, I must know what that duty is" (Smith to Richardson, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, August 27, 1863).

The frustration in Smith's language is evident. He has been placed in the unenviable position of commanding a military school enrolling at least some students below the age of conscription while simultaneously meeting the expectations of a military community that simply needed men and supplies from any source.

Richardson's response of September 4, 1863, laid to rest any doubts Smith might have held about committing the corps to battle:

" . . .the Governor decides that, although general military service is not due from the Corps of Cadets to the State, yet. . .the Corps, to the extent of guarding and defending the Military Institute, and other public property connected with it, being a part of the military establishment of the State, may, and must, be used for that purpose. . . and whether that defense be necessary upon the spot, or at a distance even of fifty miles, that does not affect or impair the obligation to meet the duty as the guard of the Institution. . . It is scarcely necessary to add that needless exposure of the Corps of Cadets shall be carefully avoided" (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1863).

At last, Smith had the Governor's approval to use the corps in emergency situations when the Superintendent felt the Institute was endangered. Again, Richardson reminds Smith that while the Governor still sees VMI as "part of the military establishment of the State," the cadets are not expected to engage in battle like the militia or Confederate army, thus retaining their student status and the status of Virginia Military as an educational institution.

Smith got the chance to test his discretionary powers concerning the use of the corps in regional military activity quite soon. Averell, having failed in his first attempt to reach Salem via the Valley, sought to try again, first in November and then again in December of 1863. Both times, Smith sent out the cadets as reinforcements for the Confederate commanders, "Mudwall" Jackson and Jubal Early, respectively (Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64: Special Order No. 212, November 5, 1863 and Special Order No. 242, December 14, 1863). In the latter order, Smith feels compelled to justify to the cadets why they are forced to march out of their barracks in the dead of night for the third time in four months: "The solemn

responsibility which withdraws the Corps of Cadets from their regular duties is an appeal to that patriotism which burns in every Southern heart." Note that Smith chooses to point out that these frequent military excursions are not seen as part of the corps' "regular duties," thus emphasizing again the dual military/academic nature of the VMI mission and distinguishing for the cadets themselves their duties from that of regular soldiers.

Luckily for the cadets (although we know they saw it as misfortune) and for the citizens of Lexington and Rockbridge County, Jackson and Early were able to turn back Averell in November and December without using the cadets and without endangering the town or the campus. However, the use of the corps in these three incidents, coupled with the training sessions at Camp Lee and the march to Staunton to reinforce "Stonewall" Jackson in 1861, laid the groundwork for the use of the cadets in battle at New Market in May 1864. Importantly, these early field missions gave VMI a role to play within the strategy of the Confederate commanders for the Valley District--that of reinforcement for regular troops. This responsibility, along with guarding Lexington and the state arsenal there, ensured that the Institute could feel as if its military /academic mission had fit well into the needs of a wartime government. Also, the cadets could already claim an active involvement in the Civil War even before the momentous events of 1864.

#### Events Surrounding the Battle of New Market

Up to 1864 all the military activities in which the cadets had taken part resulted from government orders or Smith's decision-making based on these orders. The Battle of New Market differs fundamentally from earlier actions in many ways: the cadets actually entered battle; loss of life resulted; the battlefield was far removed from Lexington. However, the most notable feature distinguishing New Market from other actions was the cadets' initiative--quite apart from institutional, government, or military prompting--on the battle field. New Market



is the story of students, not governments, administrators, soldiers, or faculty, who largely made their own decisions and chose their own fate. For this reason, analysis of the cadets actions at New Market can be found in the "Student Affairs" section of this chapter.

The actions that brought the cadets to New Market in the first place, though, resulted from military orders received by Superintendent Smith from Confederate Generals Imboden and Breckinridge. Smith had already received word from R.E. Lee via Adjutant-General Richardson that he was to "hold the command in readiness to co-operate with General Breckinridge and General Imboden, in case of necessity. . . ." (Richardson to Smith, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, April 30, 1864). By May 1864, this "necessity" had arisen. As Shelby Foote writes, "[Union General Franz] Sigel was intent on. . . winning control of the Shenandoah Valley before the wheat in its fields was ripe for grinding into flour to feed Lee's army" (v. III 247). Breckinridge, on the other hand was equally intent in preventing the Federal army from threatening Lee's left flank (Lee was in Richmond) (Davis 55). Foote explains that "Lee hoped that Sigel's defeat would bring fear to Washington and cause movement of fewer troops to Grant in Petersburg" (v.III 250).

John Breckinridge, former Vice-President of the United States and unsuccessful candidate for President in 1860, alerted Smith on May 10 that "Sigel is moving up [South] the Valley--was at Strasburg last night. . .I would be glad to have your assistance at once, with the cadets, and the section of artillery. Bring all forage and rations you can. . . ." (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1864).

Smith then issued General Orders Number 18, sending the cadets to Staunton under the command of Colonel Scott Ship. Ship would wait for orders from Breckinridge upon reaching Staunton (Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64, May 11, 1864). On May 13, Ship

received orders from Breckinridge to march to Harrisonburg along with the other reserves for the Army of the Shenandoah (F. Smith, VMI 195). The cadets were ordered to shore up the lines of the 26th Virginia as they moved forward from Mt. Tabor to New Market (W. Davis 94). In battle on May 15, 1864, 10 cadets were killed and 45 wounded (200). In playing a critical role in the Confederate victory on that day, the cadets had helped to "save the wheat crops in what was called the bread basket of Virginia. . .and to free a portion of [Breckinridge's] command to reinforce the army north of Richmond" (Foote, v.III 250). Of course, the meaning of the battle to the cadets themselves and to the Institute was to be of equally momentous importance.

After the battle, state officials and Confederate government officials in Richmond were quick to applaud the cadets' actions at New Market, revealing the symbolism attached to the Institute's sacrifice on the field of battle. After all, as mere boys in many cases, and as "the flower of the South's youth" (Davis 48), the cadets had sacrificed their lives for the southern cause, thus idealizing honorable southern manhood (and no doubt the kind of blind devotion the Confederacy needed from more of its tired soldiers). Adjutant-General Richardson sent word to Smith on May 16, 1864, to "march the cadets to Richmond and report to the Secretary of War. . ." (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1864). But the corps' visit to Richmond was to be more than ceremonial. Richardson included in his letter a letter he had received from Confederate Secretary of War, J.A. Seddon: "'I have thought the gallant Corps of Cadets at the Institute could be most advantageously summoned here. Where else could they more appropriately signalize their valor and patriotism than in the defense of the Capital of their native State?'" (Richardson to Smith, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, May 16, 1864). The cadets were also to resume their earlier recruit training activities at Camp Lee. Thus, the cadets' bravery at New Market could serve two immediate purposes for the state and the Confederacy: 1. they could "signalize" the "valor and patriotism" the Confederacy

desperately needed; and, 2. the Confederate government could count on them, in guarding Richmond, to sacrifice themselves to the southern cause as few soldiers in the regular army would still be willing to do. VMI had now become an important component in the Confederate government's war against both the Union troops and the against the apathy of many southern troops. The Institute's importance to Virginia and to the "nation" had never been greater.

As if to reinforce this importance, Governor William Smith presided over a ceremony on Capital Square honoring the cadets' participation at New Market and the Confederate States House of Representatives passed an official resolution honoring the same (F. Smith, VMI 198-99). No mention is made in any contemporary source of a like ceremony for the other units of New Market, a fact that emphasizes the officially sanctioned symbolism already attached to the Battle of New Market by state and Confederate officials: the cadets, more than any other unit, would be forever associated with the battle and were to be revered as southern heroes at a time when the South was running dangerously thin on heroes.

Ironically, while the corps was originally ordered by the Governor and the Confederate government to guard the property of the Institute and the town of Lexington in case of federal invasion, the cadets actually could do little to save the Institute or Lexington when the invasion actually occurred. Union General David Hunter had taken the place of the now relieved Franz Sigel as the Union commander charged with capturing railroad lines to the South. And Hunter was on the move. Few Confederate forces could be spared to stand in his way and he reached Lexington and Virginia Military on June 11, 1864. We know this is the date Hunter passed through the walls of the Institute from the graffiti of Union soldiers who stole the Superintendent's Order Books and recorded their own entry on June 11 (Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64). Luckily, the cadets had not been placed in harms way. For if they had remained in Lexington rather than leaving their barracks, additional casualties

would no doubt have resulted. Hunter, who eventually became the general in charge of the Lincoln conspirators trial, was not a softhearted man, as his actions in Lexington confirm, and he likely would have shown little deference to the cadets if they had resisted his destruction of the Institute. (For additional analysis of the destruction of VMI, see the "Architecture and Facilities" section of this chapter).

Just prior to Hunter's invasion, the cadets had been placed under direct state authority and had been ordered to Lexington via Lynchburg:

"The Corps of Cadets having been by order of the President turned over to the State Authority and the movements of the enemy appearing to involve the safety of the Institute, and other public property of Lexington, the Governor directs that you cause the Corps to be returned to the Institute by railroad, via Lynchburg. . .the Corps may not be exposed to battle other than is absolutely necessary." (Richardson to Smith, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, June 6, 1864).

The cadets reached the Institute on June 9 (J. Wise 351) but were unable to mount much of defense of the campus in light of superior Union forces. Margaret Junkin Preston, wife of VMI founding father and professor, J.T.L. Preston, recorded in her diary why the cadets abandoned the Institute: "The cadets have been under arms all night; have not yet moved. Resistance was at first spoken of; but there were only three of the Institute cannon brought back and. . .it is vain to offer opposition with such a mere handful as could be brought together. . ." (147). The cadets then retreated en masse into the Blue Ridge Mountains (Couper, v. III 26).

Understandably, as Hunter burnt almost the entire campus, the Institute could no longer function as an academic unit. Since the academic year had almost concluded anyway, the cadets were sent home on leave for the summer by the Board of Visitors (Couper, v. III 49).

Confederate officials soon called for their services again in the defense of Richmond (Richmond Sentinel, October 4, 1864 1). The cadets were to report to Camp Lee as part of the Confederate forces stationed there. Smith complained loudly to state Adjutant-General,

William Richardson that if the cadets were made part and parcel of Confederate forces, the corps, and thus the Institute, would be broken up (Smith to Richardson, October 8, 1864, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, 1864). Nevertheless, the use of the cadets by Confederate forces in Richmond continued until December 1864, when Smith ordered the cadets to move into the Alms House in Richmond, their new barracks. Smith detailed the cadets new status in Special Orders Number 126: "The Corps of Cadets having been relieved by the Secretary of War from their duty in the field and turned over to the authorities of the State, will be moved into the Alms House, Richmond, early Monday morning (12th) (J. Wise 393). On the same day, Smith also issued General Orders Number 23, explaining that the Board of Visitors had "directed the temporary organization of the Institute at the Alms House, Richmond. . ." (J. Wise 393).

The cadets remained at the Alms House, serving in the trenches that ringed the town, until April 2, 1865, only days before Lee's surrender at Appomattox (J. Wise 318). With Richmond's evacuation, the service of the cadets in the war effort at long last ended. The Institute's students and faculty had served in events of immense importance to the governments of Virginia and of the Confederate States: John Brown's execution at Harper's Ferry in 1859; preliminary training of confederate troops; the early stages of "Stonewall" Jackson's 1861 Shenandoah Valley Campaign; the most critical battle in the 1864 Valley campaign, New Market; the defense of Richmond. VMI had seen the arc of events surrounding and defining the Civil War as had no other college in its time. Its close relationship with Virginia government and eventually with the Confederate government ordained that the Institute would suffer many hardships reserved only for military personnel. But these ties also ensured that the Institute saw its own hand in the events that made history.

### **Academic Affairs**

Certainly, the academic nature of Virginia Military during the Civil War was deemphasized due to concentration on the military aspects of the Institute's mission. However, if one could characterize academics during this period, it would entail continuity amidst chaos. Smith's and the Board of Visitors' attempts to keep the Institute functioning in some respect as an educational institution helped to ensure that the Institute's personnel and students survived the war as a single entity and experienced events critical to institutional saga as a single entity. In this respect, while the Institute's relationship with state government and with the Confederate government brought it face to face with some of the most important events in American history, the continuation of academic studies maintained organizational cohesiveness and filtered the events the cadets and the faculty experienced through the shared history of the Institute.

Changes in the curriculum were the first harbingers that academics would play a supporting role to VMI's military responsibilities. The Board decided in April 1861 that military instruction should take precedence over all other forms of academic instruction and that artillery instruction should serve as the focus of this learning (Couper, v. II 74). Moreover, Smith placed the corps on a virtual war footing, drilling the cadets in strictly military sciences from 5:30 am to 1:00 pm each day. Exercises comprised military engineering, light infantry training, mortar and cannon drilling, and tactics, among others (Order Number 61, April 18, 1861, Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64). Also, VMI faculty were enlisted to help the "faculty and students" of Washington College in "instruction of tactics" (Order Number 62, April 18, 1861, Superintendent's Orders 1857-64).

Among the most pressing problems, though, was the number of drop outs leaving the Institute to sign up for active service in the Virginia militia. While Smith was away in Richmond, Acting Superintendent J.T.L. Preston wrote to him that "we have only about 30

cadets in the barracks" and that a "volunteer company" of local recruits had taken up some of the additional space (Preston to Smith, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, April 24, 1861). Preston went on to add that "7 of the cadets from other states have resigned and others will do so as soon as they can get money from home." Preston suggested admitting new cadets on any terms to alleviate the shortage. Unfortunately, this suggestion would not come fast enough to save the Institute, which closed its doors and moved the cadets to Richmond in May 1861 (Order, May 14, 1861, Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64). Soon, however, both Smith and Preston were transferred by the state to Norfolk, leaving VMI without its two most experienced leaders (Margaret Junkin Preston 120). Preston would eventually join the staff of "Stonewall" Jackson while Smith would return to VMI for its reopening in January 1862 (Margaret Junkin Preston 121).

In the same May 14, 1861, order, Smith mentions that while some cadets will remain as "the guard to the Institute," and that the corps will remain a unit "except that there will be no academic duties and the instruction will be exclusively military" (Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64). Note that Smith, even at this early date, is intent on keeping the Institute together in some semblance of a college and is not willing to see the Institute broken apart for varied military service. While academic instruction was suspended for the period between May 1861 and January 1862, the corps nevertheless existed in name and many of the cadets served as a unit in Camp Lee, training militia recruits while others served as the guard of the Institute.

In his annual report to the Board of Visitors and the legislature of July 1861, Smith details the number of professors who have left the Institute, usually via orders from the state to enter active military service. He concludes this list by stating that "the entire active force of the Institute, embracing professors, assistant professors, and cadets, have been constantly

engaged in duties directly connected with the military operations and defenses of the state" (Board of Visitors Report, July 15, 1861). In this same report, Smith also argues for the continued operation of the Institute as an academic, instructional institution even during war time. He links the reason that the faculty and students are now serving the state to the fact that they all are connected to a military school that can continue to serve the state best by remaining open in some form (Board of Visitors Report, 1861). In essence, Smith himself is linking the Institute's use in military affairs to the schools's dual academic/military mission, thus setting the stage for linking the historical events in which the cadets and faculty took part with the school itself. In this respect, Smith is single-handedly responsible for keeping the idea of the Institute as an educational institution alive while virtually no one else saw it in those terms. In an addendum to this report dated September 10, 1861, though, Smith admits that the lack of faculty, students, and money has forced him to "recommend to the Board of Visitors to postpone for a time the usual academic duties of the school" (Board of Visitors Report, Addendum, September 10, 1861). With this, the academic, but not the military responsibilities of the Institute closed.

Additionally, Smith had some strong support from influential parties regarding the educational nature of the Institute. On April 10, 1862, the Lexington Gazette quoted Robert E. Lee as saying that "we never wanted the advantages of military instruction more than now and the Virginia Military Institute is the best and purest fountain from which we can be supplied. . ." (1). With backers such as Lee, VMI could be assured of its continuing educational mission, even if in relation to military instruction alone. Military education would remain the central mission of VMI throughout the war, despite the interruptions of active duty service and the resignation of dozens of cadets. This mission kept VMI the organization, not just the individual cadets and faculty who served in the militia or the army, tied to the war effort.



### Jackson's Death

One of those faculty whose ties to the Institute remained strong throughout his service in the Confederate Army was Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, the hero of First and Second Manassas and of the Shenandoah Valley campaign. Through his military service and the legend which surrounded his person even before death, Jackson had already given the Institute a link with history. His reliance upon cadets to train his troops and upon VMI faculty (such as Preston) to serve as his personal staff helped Virginia Military to garner some of the fame Jackson himself enjoyed after his stand at Manassas in September 1861. Moreover, Jackson made clear that while his duty was in the field, he would have preferred to remain at VMI as a faculty member, thus offering up yet another form of support for the Institute (Margaret Junkin Preston 123).

But if Jackson's military fame rubbed off on the Institute, his death and the subsequent myth-making that surrounded him, provided the first lasting historical link between VMI and the larger events of the War and also established a tie between the Institute and the romanticized "lost cause" of the Confederacy.

Jackson's death from pneumonia brought on by amputation of his left arm after the Battle of Chancellorsville on May 10, 1863, gave the South its first war hero to idealize. In turn, since Jackson was a faculty member at VMI, many mourners viewed the Institute as Jackson's home--and any organization associated with "Stonewall" became affiliated with a new brand of southern hero worship. Adjutant-General Richardson, in his letter detailing Jackson's death to Smith, set the stage for this association:

"This heavy bereavement over which every true heart within the bounds of the Confederacy mourns with inexpressible sorrow, must fall, if possible, with heavier force upon the noble State Institution to which he came from the battlefields of Mexico, and where he gave to his native State the first years of service of . . . his useful life.

"To the Corps of Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute, what a legacy he has left you, what an example of all that is good and great and true in the character of a Christian soldier!" (Richardson to Smith, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, May 11, 1863).

And indeed the legacy Jackson left to the Institute was to be an important one. It was to give VMI its own claim to a legitimate national hero. Moreover, as Richardson notes, Jackson embodied the "Christian soldier"--the honorably violent man that southern society revered and around which Virginia Military had build an entire curriculum. To a great extent, Jackson personified the Institute's mission: academic, military, intensely loyal to the South, and willing to sacrifice life itself for honor and the southern social fabric.

Since the Governor gave the Institute the prime responsibility for the funeral, we can also infer that State officials saw the importance of the Institute in the newly forming Jackson mythology (Richardson to Smith, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, May 10, 1863). Smith certainly understood Jackson's importance to cultivating the Institute's unique identity:

"Young gentlemen of the Corps of Cadets--The memory of General Jackson is very precious to you. . . [Smith then goes on to detail, in syntax similar to biblical poetry, the numerous achievements of Jackson's career]. Surely the Virginia Military Institute has a precious inheritance in the memory of General Jackson. His work is finished. God gave him to us, and to his country. . . Reverence the memory of such a man as General Jackson. Imitate his virtues, and here, over his lifeless remains, reverently dedicate your service, and your life, in need be in defense of the cause so dear to his heart; the cause for which he fought and bled; the cause in which he died." (General Order Number 30, May 13, 1863, Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64).

Smith's words are phrased almost as a prayer, as if Jackson represented a holy figure in a holy war. Indeed, he would soon become such a figure and the cult that grew up around his memory would permeate the Institute's identity and eventually provide part of the mould for an institutional saga. In this sense, Jackson's death and the cult of personality that grew up around the General, helped to strengthen VMI's association with the South and with the spirit of the southern culture that "Stonewall" represented.

Smith even devoted a large section in his annual report for 1863 on the importance of Jackson's death and proclaimed that he was planning to present a lecture to the cadets and faculty on the merits of Jackson and the necessity of modeling their behavior on his life (Superintendent's Annual Report, July 15, 1863). Also in this report, Smith gives a good account of the faculty at the Institute and of the coursework still offered in the midst of the war. Smith mentions specifically fifteen instructors, nine of whom are cadets (assistant professors with the rank of lieutenant) (Superintendent's Report, 1863). Coursework had changed little since the beginning of the war, save the emphasis on artillery, tactics, light infantry, and mathematics--all subjects of natural interest during war time. The departments of applied science that Smith had mentioned in the 1860 catalogue had been suspended due to the war ( Board of Visitors Report). Smith goes on to add that "all the departments of instruction have been materially affected from the scarcity of text books, and this want will be increased during the next academic year. We have also been embarrassed in our efforts to secure an adequate supply of competent assistant professors. . ." (Superintendent's Report, 1863). A lack of qualified applicants to the Institute meant that many of the matriculants were of a lower quality than usual, thus creating a smaller pool from which to draw assistant professors. The superintendent seems reluctant to admit in his report just how difficult the Institute has been to keep open and operating during the previous year, concentrating instead on the number of remaining faculty and conspicuously omitting the large number of cadets who had left the institution or who were planning to do so. Smith makes sure that the state (if not the Board) believes VMI is able to operate as an educational unit despite the war.

As a means of placing their current duties within the context of the Institute's ongoing mission, Smith felt compelled on November 11 of that year to remind the cadets of the twenty-fourth anniversary of the founding of the Institute. By remarking that "twenty-four years

have rolled away since the proud flag of Virginia was first waved over the Corps of Cadets" (General Orders Number 88, Superintendent's Orders 1857-64), Smith recalls the history of the Institute itself, rather than current events alone. In doing so, the Superintendent makes sure that the cadets and faculty remember that the events in which they are currently involved are but another chapter--albeit an immensely important one--in the continuing history of the Institute itself.

### In the Wake of New Market

Unlike the period after Jackson's death, when the Institute could at least pretend to function in a normal academic routine, the months immediately following the cadets' participation in the Battle of New Market were marked with even greater strife for the Institute. Between the corps' trip to Richmond, Hunter's burning of the VMI grounds in May 1864, the direction of the corps by the Confederate government, and the suspension of all further academic activities until January 1865, there was little time to synthesize the meaning of these events into the mission and identity of the institution.

Nevertheless, the Board of Visitors still held its regular meeting at the end of the academic year, which came in May rather than July for obvious reasons. At that meeting, the Board decided to go ahead and graduate the class of 1864 as of July 4, 1864, and to postpone examinations for the remaining cadets until later in the year (Special Orders, May 26, 1864, Board of Visitor Minutes, 1864). A month later the Board decided to suspend studies altogether for all cadets until September 1 (J. Wise 379). Despite the VMI's closing, the Board completed the academic year and set a specific date for the return of cadets, thus revealing the depth of the Visitors' commitment to the academic mission of the Institute even in the face of extreme circumstances. If Virginia Military could reopen, then Smith and the Board could feel

fairly safe in the school's survival. Their ability to reopen the school would be a critical event in and of itself in the VMI saga.

The Board admitted 65 new cadets for the following academic year as proof of their expectancy to reopen the school in the Fall (Couper, v.III 55). As events conspired against this opening, the legislature finally allocated \$15,000 for the rent of the Alms House in Richmond and the cadets secured a temporary home in which to carry on academic exercises (whenever possible amidst the chaos in Richmond) (74).

Before that development, however, Smith was forced to deal with the potential breaking up of the corps during October 1864 when the Confederate government hoped to use the cadets in several different places in the war effort. Smith's insistence on keeping the cadets together was based on his belief that if the cadets were conscripted into the Confederate army, the "Virginia Military Institute will be destroyed" (Smith to Richardson, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, October 8, 1864). Again we see Smith's basic unwillingness to place the organizational integrity of the Institute in jeopardy, especially in light of the recent burning of the campus. If the Confederate War Department had broken up the corps completely, scattering the cadets among various army units, VMI would have ceased to exist. But, as Smith knew, if any component of the corps could stay together under the name of VMI, and carry out at least some of the responsibilities requisite to the Institute's mission, VMI could survive as an educational institution. And that, even in the face of a "national" emergency, was Smith's first priority.

This situation is critical in understanding VMI's changing institutional identity. For perhaps the first time, Smith is unwilling to sacrifice the welfare of the Institute for the southern cause. The fact that the state of Virginia had not placed such a mandate upon the

school may have made a difference; Smith may have felt more comfortable in questioning the Confederate government. In any case, in Smith's mind, the continued existence of the Institute seems to have taken precedence over the needs of the Confederate government. Smith is now asserting a more independent role for the Institute, one related to organizational priorities, not the needs of government. This emerging independence represented the importance that VMI's leadership now placed on the cultivation and protection of the Institute's own distinct mission and organizational identity. No longer would VMI take a passive role in the face of government demands. It now could claim its own heritage and with this self-awareness came the primal urge for self-defense.

Luckily for Smith, Adjutant-General Richardson understood his plea and helped to mitigate the War Department's use of the corps. As Jennings Wise writes, Richardson "obtained assurances from the Secretary of War that no intention of dispersing the cadets, or interfering with the conduct of the Institute, was entertained, and that the Corps would be used only under the most emergent conditions" (387).

After the War Department relieved the cadets of their responsibilities to the Confederate government in December 1864, thus placing the Institute under state aegis once again, the cadets moved en masse into the Alms House in Richmond. While they were called upon at various intervals to take part in the defense of the city (see the "Government Relations" section of this chapter), the cadets were nevertheless required to attend academic classes as well, including moral philosophy, Latin, French, and geography (Couper, v. III 77). Thus, the academic nature of the Institute remained, even in the thick of the Confederate capitol's most desperate hours. Indeed, as Couper speculates, VMI was probably one of the few remaining colleges in operation in Virginia at that time (77). The Board's resolution to keep the Institute alive during these turbulent months in Richmond even extended to their

unwillingness to excuse cadets from Spring term examinations (Couper, v. III 110). Moreover, since the cadets were forced to leave Richmond in April 1865, long before the end of the academic year, the Board agreed not to graduate the class of 1865 without forcing them to pass the required coursework and examinations! (110). The academic nature of VMI had survived, even as the military responsibilities of the corps ended with the evacuation of Richmond and Lee's surrender at Appomattox a few days later.

### After the War

On October 16, 1865, the Institute reopened its doors for the first time since the April 4 evacuation of the Alms House in Richmond (Couper, v.III 118). Smith had been able to secure the services of some of the old faculty (such as Gilham and Ship) and had added new faculty where needed (118). Among the new faculty, Robert E. Lee's son, George Washington Custis Lee, had agreed to join the Institute as Professor of Civil Engineering (G.W.C. Lee to Smith, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, July 17, 1865), thus continuing VMI's link with Virginia's antebellum, patrician past.

The immediate problem for the Institute however, once Smith had decided to use the existing buildings (his house, the Hospital, and the Porter's Lodge) for classrooms (Lyle 110-11), was securing funding for the Institute. Since Virginia was now under Federal government control and a new governor, appointed by the U.S. Government was in charge, Smith and the Board acted quickly to help establish good relations with the new government. In a "Special Report of the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute" dated September 22, 1865, only weeks before VMI reopened, the Board begins by stating its intention to restore "the Institute to its former condition of usefulness" (3). To this end, it asks for the state "Legislature to make immediate provision" for the Institute's operations (3). The Board goes on to commend itself as a possible key agent in the reconstruction of Virginia after the war in

its ability to act as something akin to a polytechnical institution (4). The Board members plead with new Governor Francis Pierpoint to "let Science direct the mind and labor of the country. . .and soon order will be brought out of confusion. . ." (5) and point out that VMI teaches a curriculum of "applied science" that is "pre-eminently fitted" (5) for the task of rebuilding the South. Out of this familiar argument for the Institute's usefulness to the state, the Board then asks for aid in constructing new barracks and classrooms (5) and goes on to list the coursework VMI offers as a means of proving its usefulness and citing the need for these new facilities. Importantly, the same Board that touted VMI's use as an educator of military officers for the twenty-six years of the Institute's existence prior to the end of the Civil War is now arguing that its academic mission is of pre-eminent importance. From this point onward in VMI's history, academic affairs will pervade the mission of the Institute. The school's military mission, now relegated to a form of institutional culture, will exist only as a subset of the formal academic curriculum.

Aside from attempting to secure funding from the new Reconstruction government in Virginia, Smith, like any good college executive, knew the value of Federal and private donations in a time of institutional crisis. In what was doubtless an embarrassing situation for the Superintendent, Smith sent out letters to many influential leaders in the North and to old friends, hoping to garner funding. His first destination was the War Department of the United States Government, where he asked for reparations for the destruction of the Institute at the hands of Hunter (E.D. Townsend to Smith, October 7, 1865, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1865). Smith received his first rejection letter here. The War Department responded by explaining to Smith that since Hunter's actions were "unauthorized by the Government," the government itself could not be held responsible for the destruction, at least until Congress allocated funding for such reparations. Smith could only attempt to sue the individual soldiers involved, but since they were now out of the military, they too could not be



sued! (Townsend to Smith, October 7, 1865). VMI would not receive money from the Federal government for another half century.

Next, Smith tried his luck with the Superintendent of West Point, George Cullum. Cullum's chilly response revealed the animosity that now stood between former friends and academic colleagues:

"We were once attached friends, and now I have no unkind feelings toward you; but as the Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy, I cannot at present, without a proper sense of the responsibilities of my position, receive one who is at the head of an institute which has done so much for the injury of my country" (Geo. Cullum to Smith, November 14, 1865, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1865).

If VMI's fame had spread throughout the South as a result of the war, its chief export to the North was infamy.

Finally, in mid December of 1865, Smith turned to his great and true personal friend, Henry DuPont, the chemical magnate, for help. DuPont's letter was full of polite refrain. The tension in his language and his obvious anger with the South for choosing the course of rebellion that had ripped the country apart and that had robbed DuPont's company of all its holdings in Virginia are obvious:

"I will say to you in all frankness that I am under no obligations to Jeff Davis & Co., or to Virginia. When the Rebellion broke out, we had in the hands of various Agents in the South, some \$200,000 worth of property. . .which was seized by the Rebels or state authority. . .

". . .if Virginia will refund the property. . .I will present to you for the purposes you have in mind such a donation as will meet your wants. . ." (DuPont to Smith, December 15, 1865, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1865).

Of course, DuPont knew perfectly well that the state of Virginia had no such money to offer, even if the Reconstruction government had a mind to repay him. But, in this manner, he could at least save face with his old friend by pretending to make a concession.

Most importantly, for purposes of this study, these rejections represent the realization on the part of many northerners of the magnitude of VMI's role in the Civil War. If VMI had been a private liberal arts college such as Washington College, can there be any doubt that it would not have met with the same reproach? To the Institute's credit, it had served the southern cause well--perhaps too well for many enemies of the Confederacy. In the "post bellum" world, while VMI would recultivate its academic mission and eventually take on most of the attributes of other American colleges, its name would remain forever synonymous with the war and with the Old South among many parties within and outside Virginia. As a result, VMI would never become the landgrant institution for Virginia, despite the fact that its curriculum and faculty were preeminently qualified to receive such an endowment. Instead, the Institute would remain small, elite, and introverted. Seen as a living bridge to Virginia's past, Virginia Military's utility to the state waned in the years after the war. Many politicians and educators saw it as a representative of Virginia's past, not its future. And, while its importance as an educator of Virginia patricians continued (and still does), its use to the state was now more symbolic than real. As a result, the Institute turned inward to celebrate past glories and revel in a distinctive saga that no one could dispute.

### **Student Affairs**

The story of Virginia Military's students during the Civil War is one of young men whose exuberance for experiencing war became the basis for a student culture tied emotionally for the first time to Virginia Military's heritage. If any one group related to the Institute can be said to have borne the harshest burdens of the war and to have gleaned the most glory from its ravages, it is surely the cadets. While their faculty may have ordered them here and ordered them there, it was they that actually experienced the events of the Civil War first hand and it would be they who would ensure VMI's distinctiveness by verifying its mission and existence through their own experiences. In turn, it was these experiences that allowed the

student body at VMI to stake its own claim in the history of VMI--a claim that would precipitate a unique student culture.

The bulk of this section details the cadets actions at New Market, the battle where VMI's student-soldiers took their own initiative in playing a decisive role in the Confederate victory. Additionally, through the published letters of Cadet Beverly Stanard, we can glimpse the everyday trials of the cadets before they reached New Market and view the impending battle of New Market through the eyes of a young man who was to die there.

Early in the War, many of the cadets resigned their positions at the Institute to enlist in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, thus creating a problem for the administration and Board, who were trying desperately to keep VMI open. Without students, their efforts would prove futile. On June 15, 1861, J.T.L. Preston wrote to Superintendent Smith, on duty in Richmond, that it was no longer possible to hold the corps together any longer because of the number resigning to join the Confederate ranks (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1861). As a result, VMI began admitting older cadets, some as old as 35, nearly twice the age of most cadets before the war (Couper, v. II 115). By January 1862, even counting these new matriculants, only 45 cadets called the barracks "home" (Couper, v. II 138).

Given the number of cadets leaving the Institute, one can guess at the attitude of most of the cadets who remained: they too wanted desperately to join the fight and could not, either because of their youth or because their parents would not consent to allow them to leave the Institute. Eighteen year-old Beverly Stanard from Orange Courthouse, Virginia, belonged to the latter group. He arrived at the Institute on January 20, 1863, and developed a hearty dislike for the Institute from the beginning, calling it "my old prison house" (Stanard 8). And yet his mother was unwilling to let him leave for the battlefield. His letters home are full of

the intense disdain for the harsh discipline meted out against the cadets and seem representative of most cadet letters, especially those of underclassmen. Also, Beverly refers to himself and his fourth class peers as "rats" in a letter dated August 28, 1863, referring to the student hazing process known as the "rat" system in which new cadets are initiated into the VMI system. Beverly's reference to the "rats" is one of the earliest, indicating that the "rat" system had not been in existence for too long at this point and certainly had not become the formalized part of the curriculum that it is today. Moreover, the presence of "rats" also reveals the development, at last, of a student subculture at VMI that, while known by Smith and faculty (as we shall see), was not condoned in all its complexities.

By December 1, Beverly had his fill of the Institute: "I ought to be there [Orange] now, fighting for my home" he tells his widowed mother, pleading with her to release him from VMI (18). But in a few weeks, Stanard was able to join the cadets in one of there three excursions into the neighboring Blue Ridge in late 1863 to help distract Averell and he seemed to enjoy the jaunt: "Although we were so near drowned, yet there was no grumbling, quite the contrary the boys were hollowing and singing the whole time" (25). Obviously, the cadets felt they belonged in the field, away from their books, and they were most happy in this environment.

Beverly had also developed a great dislike for "Old Spex"--Superintendent Smith:

"Mother, let me give you an idea what sort of man Gen. Smith is--after our return from our last march, the government sent up 300 pairs of shoes for the cadets as presents or to pay for our own that we wore out and now Gen. Smith will not let a cadet have a pair if he has gotten shoes from the Institute within the last 6 months. . . They fall in Specs hands who furnishes all his darkeys with a good pair" (32).

Obviously, Smith felt compelled to ration shoes--a good idea considering the shortages he no doubt knew were coming. But young Stanard saw the Superintendent as the scheming enemy

of the cadets. This attitude, especially after New Market, was to develop into an independence that would foster a student culture far less tolerant of administrative rule-making.

The Superintendent, however, was grappling with his own problems. Aside from the war, at least one cadet, W.A. Daniel, had complained to the Virginia House of Delegates about the hazing treatment he had received at VMI. In a letter to Speaker of the House Hugh Sheffer, Smith outlined Daniel's complaint: that he had been subjected to rites of "initiation" by the cadets that surpassed commonly held views of "good order and good morale" and that the officers of the Institute were guilty of "neglect of duty" for allowing the hazing to occur (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, March 6, 1863). While the military subcommittee of the House found that no real crime had been committed, they nevertheless condemned the treatment Daniels claimed to have received at the hands of his fellow cadets (Superintendent's Report, July 4, 1863). In a broad sense, the whole situation reveals the independence that the students were beginning to show at VMI. After all, an "initiation" connotes the need to belong to some organized unit, some group that possesses its own unique beliefs and standards for admission, and if the students themselves (even with administrative knowledge) had taken it upon themselves to "initiate" new "rats," then the fundamental elements of a student culture seem present.

Moreover, Smith's response to Adjutant-General Richardson in his Annual Report is a curious apology and simultaneous defense of the "hazing." "The process of 'initiation' to which young men are subjected who enter public schools is an evil, no one can deny" (Superintendent's Report, July 4, 1863). But to this, Smith adds later in the report that "the evil cannot be entirely removed" and thus must be made into a positive reinforcement of the aims the Institute hopes to instill into young men. In essence, Smith proposes using the "initiation" of "rats" for the good of the Institute--to tie this informal hazing into the formal

curriculum of the Institute. Beverly Stanard seems to substantiate this process in a letter to his mother dated around the time of the "hazing" flap, March 14, 1864: "Old Spex says we can substitute greening [verbal abuse, practical jokes] in the place of bucking [slapping with a scabbard] for the new cadets" (45).

When the merger between school policy and student culture actually occurred some years later, we see the development of the institutionally sanctioned "rites of initiation" VMI uses even today. By achieving this process, the students own extracurricular urges to establish their own culture began to be used by the school itself to further the mission and culture of the entire institution. This was the first step in finally incorporating the students' belief system into VMI's already distinctive academic and administrative cultures. With this plan, Smith had laid the groundwork (unknowingly, of course) for complying with the fourth component of Burton Clark's five steps in the creation of a distinctive college: the development of a student subculture that "incorporates the image of the college" (246). Prior to this date, one can make the case that three have already been satisfied: a unique curriculum, faculty support, and powerful support from external sources. However, the act of tying the student subculture to the "image of the college" would take more than an administrative plan; it would require an event to forge student experience to institutional mission in an unbreakable bond. The Battle of New Market became such an event.

#### The Battle of New Market

In the Spring of 1864, Union General Franz Sigel was ordered by Grant, now in charge of the Army of the Potomac, to proceed up the Valley from Winchester, capture Staunton and Lexington and proceed to Salem to capture the Virginia-Tennessee Railroad junction there (W. Davis 44-5). Lee sent Major General John Breckinridge to stop Sigel (49).

As so many times before, the cadets from VMI were called out to serve as reinforcements for the Confederate Army of the Shenandoah. A force of 229 cadets and officers under the command of Commandant of Cadets Scott Ship left the Institute on May 12 to head for Staunton where they were to await orders from Breckinridge (196). Beverly Stanard, among the cadets on the march, wrote on that date that the cadets expected to "march to Harrisonburg" after reaching Staunton first (61).

In Staunton, many of the cadets visited girlfriends or relatives and John Wise, recalling the events of New Market in a speech at New Market in 1898, noted that "several dances were arranged. . .and we were in our element" (Couper, v. III 271). Understandably, many of the active military thought the cadets an overprotected group of dandies whose perfect formation marching would prove worthless on the battlefield. As the cadets continued on through Staunton towards Harrisonburg on the 13th and 14th of May, the veterans sang nursery rhymes to them and taunted them about their impending deaths on the battlefield (W. Davis 53). "We were furious" recounted Wise (Couper, v.III 272).

On May 14, the cadets stopped to spend the evening at Mt Tabor Church, near New Market, but were awakened at midnight and ordered to proceed down the Valley to the hamlet of New Market (W. Davis 78). At 1:30 am on the 15th, the "corps took its place in the marching column" heading toward Sigel's army. Breckinridge had no real desire to use the cadets in the upcoming battle and had ordered them to stay behind the line as a reserve force (82). The cadets had other ideas. They advanced along side the 26th Virginia until they reached the battlefield. John Wise, along with Beverly Stanard and two other cadets ordered to remain at the baggage wagon in the rear, ran forward too, joining the four companies (A-D) as they marched up the slope toward a small rise above New Market (94-5).

Suddenly, Sigel's artillery opened fire; canister dropped amidst companies C and D and 5 cadets fell wounded, one, Beverly Stanard, mortally (W. Davis 95). With Ship at their lead, the cadets then marched into the front lines near a white frame farmhouse owned by the Bushong family. They were soon ordered to fill a gap that had developed in the Confederate lines (122). More shells landed in their ranks, killing three more cadets instantly. As they proceeded 50 yards further, another cadet was killed by a sniper's bullet (122). Soon, after plodding through a muddy low point on the battlefield known afterwards as the "Field of Lost Shoes" for all the lost cadet boots there, the cadets had outdistanced the Confederate left flank. As they advanced farther they found themselves at the center of the southern lines. They stopped to rest behind a fence encircling an apple orchard but soon found the Union firepower too stiff to remain. The cadets, now leading themselves since Ship had been knocked unconscious by the repercussion of a Union artillery blast, had to make a fateful decision: retreat and leave a gap in the center of the Confederate lines or charge into the hail of Federal gunfire (J. Wise 282). If one can point to a single moment in time upon which the entire saga of the Virginia Military Institute hinges, it was this; the cadets charged. No faculty ordered them to do so; they were far ahead of the Confederate regulars and their commandant lay dazed and wounded behind them. The cadets themselves made the decision.

Bewildered, amazed, the Union lines broke and ran, taking up positions several hundred yards behind where they had originally stood. Again the cadets advanced and again Sigel's men retreated (Davis 136). The wounded Confederate regulars lying some distance behind the cadets, cheered them in their advance: "the veterans had been wrong. Training, discipline, spirit, and tradition were paying well" (W. Davis 29). At last, the Confederates held the field; Sigel's men were retreating back down the Valley and Breckinridge ordered the cadets to halt their advance, riding up to their lines and congratulating them with tears in his eyes, "Well done, Virginians!" (147).



In the rush of adrenalin that had swept the cadets along Bushong's Hill, the wounded and fallen had been temporarily forgotten. But with the end of the battle, the awful reality of the engagement set in. Ten cadets lay mortally wounded or dead (W. Davis 200). John Wise's friend, Beverly Stanard, who had written his mother on May 12, that he hoped to be "spared to see you again" (Stanard 62) was among the dying (J. Wise 285). Another 45 cadets lie wounded (200), not counting the wounded faculty (Ship among them). Death had become real to the cadets. The horrors of the battlefield had transformed the rhetoric of sacrifice for the South, for one's family and home, into a sacrifice of flesh and blood. From now on, the cadets who had fought at New Market and lived to tell about it did not need and would not tolerate Smith, the Board, or any other authority lecturing them on the need to serve one's country. They had served Virginia and had given up their lives to defend its soil. They now had their own heritage associated with the war and with the Institute and they could create their own traditions, ceremonies, and myths from this heritage. As a group, they, not the administration and faculty, had represented the mission of VMI on the field at New Market and they, not the administration and faculty had acted on their beliefs.

Thomas Davis writes that the battle was, for the cadets, "the high point of their service for the Confederacy and the beginning of a lasting legend and tradition" (140). He also summarizes quite well how, through the cadets who had served at New Market, the myth and legend that surrounded the battle amplified the VMI saga:

"Colonel Ship made a career of the Institute, changing his name to Shipp, and becoming Superintendent in 1890. During his years there he saw the growth and blossoming of the New Market tradition and legend. . .

"Former [New Market] cadet, Moses Ezekiel, later known as Sir Moses, . . . would create a monument, "Virginia Mourning Her Dead" to rest over [the graves of the fallen cadets]. Year after year ceremonies would take place on the battle's anniversary commemorating the bravery and sacrifice of the ten who died and the rest who fought and bled for the Valley and Virginia. With every passing year the exploits of the Corps of Cadets would grow in the veterans' fading memories and in the burgeoning imagination of others" (178-79).

What Davis is describing can also be summed up as student culture, that allusive component that all distinctive colleges possess but which VMI could not really claim before New Market. Hughes, Becker, and Geer, in their chapter in The American College entitled "Student Culture and Academic Effort," define the concept as:

"a whole body of conceptions and images and problems, and situations and of proper and justifiable solutions of them arrived at by the students; in part, passed along from one generation to another, in part apparently rediscovered--or at least reinforced--by each succeeding generation as they pass through the same experiences" (518).

The cadets "arrived at" a "justifiable solution" to their "situation" at the apple orchard at New Market all on their own! Of course, Hughes, et al., could scarcely have had in mind the type of "situation" the cadets faced on the battlefield when they constructed their definition, but the comparison is worth making. Because of their decisions and actions on the battlefield, the cadets now had their own unique experiences linked to the VMI mission and a real reason to care about how the Institute fared in later years. After all, since their lives were now part of the VMI heritage, they surely desired to have some control over how this heritage was imparted to successive classes of cadets and certainly felt a loyalty to the Institute and to its mission that their predecessors could not have imagined.

After the battle, the cadets received numerous laudations from both state and Confederate officials (see "Government Relations" section of this chapter). These official sanctions served to reinforce the cadets' justifiable pride in their actions at New Market and provided the added impetus for the development of a unique student subculture among the New Market veterans. There is little doubt, then, that at the close of the war, after serving together yet again in the trenches at Richmond and in witnessing the fall of the Confederacy, three New Market cadets decided to create a fraternal organization whose ideals would

represent their common experiences. They organized Alpha Tau Omega in Richmond in the fall of 1865 (Couper, V.III 130). The fraternity was to play a significant role in the coming years in the emerging student subculture borne from the cadets' experiences at New Market. Today, "ATO's" membership numbers in the thousands at its chapters throughout North America.

### **Community Relations**

In a community such as Lexington, close enough to some of the largest battles fought during the entire war, protection from northern invasion was an ever-present reality. As a result, many citizens of Rockbridge County looked to Virginia Military for leadership in defending their homes and as a defensive bulwark to dissuade marauding Union generals from attacking Lexington without first giving thought to the consequences. Indeed, because of their strongly pro-secessionist sentiments, the VMI faculty and cadets were viewed as links with the larger ideals that the war itself embodied, states' rights among them.

Unfortunately, these associations sometimes led to trouble with townspeople who were not quite so willing to embrace the Institute's secessionist sentiments. Shortly after the firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, the cadets, supervised by T.J. Jackson, hung a Virginia state flag from the top of the barracks' walls upon which were stenciled the words, "Hurray for South Carolina" (Couper, v.II 79). This incited the ire of more than a few of the townspeople who were against secession. Little else was required to start a "town-gown" donnybrook and when a few cadets scuffled with some Unionist townsfolk on April 13 over the raising of a pro-Unionist flag a full-fledged riot seemed imminent. Smith wrote to William Richardson on April 18, that

"the passions aroused by the attempts to raise two flags in Lexington on Saturday, one Secession and the other Union, were accompanied with the manifestation of much bitterness. . . Being a recreation day, many of the cadets were in Lexington, and being thus thrown in contact with persons and parties differing much with them in

sentiment, occasional jars occurred. . ." (Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, 1861).

Actually, somewhat more than "occasional jars occurred." Soon, the entire corps had marched en masse into Lexington and was prepared to defend itself from the mob of townspeople that had begun to threaten the few lone cadets already in town. With this, the townspeople called out the militia. Just before hostilities of a truly nasty turn could break out, though, Smith arrived on the scene and ordered the cadets back to their barracks (Smith to Richardson, April 18, 1861, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, 1861). At no time in VMI's long history has there been a greater strain in "town-gown" relations. Obviously, the cadets were staunchly pro-secession--their upbringing and social class could afford them no other opinion--and when their sentiments mixed with the working class opinions of many Lexington natives who had little to gain from states' rights, tempers flared. The flag raising incident represents the type of violent confrontations between Unionists and Secessionists that took place throughout the upper South during the first months of the war and also reveals the intensity of Virginia Military's loyalty to the southern cause.

But if Virginia Military was dedicated to the Confederate cause, there were those in the town that were dedicated to Virginia Military, and to its heroes. Margaret Junkin Preston was the wife of J.T.L. Preston, a founder of VMI and a faculty member since the Institute's opening in 1839, and the sister-in-law of "Stonewall" Jackson. She was also the daughter of the President of Washington College, George Junkin, and a Pennsylvanian by birth. During the war, though, her loyalties remained with her adopted state, Virginia, despite the fact that her father thought secession a great evil and returned North (Margaret Junkin Preston 58). Moreover, Margaret Preston's diary gives us a good idea of how "Stonewall" Jackson's death helped to bring the Lexingtonians closer to the Institute. At Jackson's funeral, attended by several Confederate dignitaries and coordinated by the Institute, Mrs. Preston notes that "a

vast concourse" of townspeople filed by the gravesite (165). Jackson's death in May 1863 brought the war home to Lexington in a tragic fashion and served to link the heroics of the man to the mission and beliefs of the Institute. After this date, VMI was to have few other troubles with the townspeople of Lexington. In fact, as Mrs. Preston records, by November 1863 the same militia units that had been called out to repulse the angry cadets in April 1861 were sent out with the cadets to help repulse Averell (171).

Likewise, there were few problems with Washington College during this period. As we know, the College had asked VMI to help instruct its students in military tactics early on in the war (Order No. 62, April 18, 1861, Superintendent's Orders, 1857-64). This cooperation was to continue throughout the war and the ties between the two institutions were to grow stronger. By war's end, the schools were brought closer still by the presence of the Lees in Lexington: Robert as President of Washington College and his son, Custis, as a professor at VMI.

By 1865, the Institute found itself in the same dire straits as the rest of the South--searching for any remedy to a situation it already knew was hopeless. Slavery had always existed in Lexington and now J.T.L. Preston, the acting Superintendent of the Institute's grounds while Smith was with the corps in Richmond suggested a way of using Virginia's slave population for the benefit of the Confederate war effort. In a February 17, 1865, letter to John Breckinridge, who some time after New Market had become Secretary of War in the Confederate government, Preston argues that he and other VMI faculty believe that the cadets and officers of the Institute could be used to train slaves to fight in the Confederate Army (J. Wise 413-14). He reckons somewhere near 1/2 million new troops could be raised in this way (414). More than anything else, this letter reveals the desperation that gripped Confederate leaders in these months before Appomattox. However, the letter confirms yet again that the

South's "peculiar institution" of slavery had strong proponents at VMI. Moreover, these proponents sought to ensure that the Institute supported the social and economic systems of its local and regional communities--systems based in part on human servitude--even up to the end of the war.

### **Architecture and Facilities**

Activities surrounding the campus' physical plant during the Civil War can be summed up by two statements: 1. no new construction occurred; and, 2. Union General David Hunter destroyed most of the Institute on June 12, 1864. Naturally, this second event had a permanent effect on the Institute--both literally and figuratively. In terms of buildings lost in the fire, Smith details in his Annual Report of July 15, 1864, that only three buildings remained: the Superintendent's quarters, the Hospital, and the Porter's Lodge (Board of Visitor's Report, July 15, 1864). This in itself endangered the very existence of the Institute since classroom space and housing for the cadets no longer existed. Operations were resumed in the Alms House in Richmond. But, in a figurative sense, Hunter's destruction of VMI represented an act of northern vindictiveness against an institution that manifested, organizationally, the ideals of Virginia and of the Old South. This rather callous act of wanton pillaging by the North confirmed in the minds of those affiliated with the Institute that they had indeed served the South well, both militarily and politically. VMI's destruction became something of a "red badge of courage" for the Institute, proving its sacrifice to the South and becoming yet another war time event to which the Institute could point and claim direct involvement. In the end, Hunter's raid would become a symbol of the importance of VMI in the southern cause and would force the Institute to rebuild a new campus after the war that would forever remind successive generations of cadets of their school's war time sacrifice.

### **Hunter's Destruction of VMI**

After Sigel's defeat at New Market, Grant replaced him with Major General David Hunter. He promptly ordered Hunter to move up the Valley in the Spring of 1864 to disrupt Confederate communications to the South wherever possible (Boatner 419). Unlike his predecessors, Hunter decided on a more direct approach, capturing Valley towns rather than skirting them. He first raided Staunton, burning it and then proceeded to Lexington, "marching in, flags flying" (Foote, v. III 310). The Confederate forces, including those of the Institute could do little but flee, leaving the town unprotected. Colonel Rutherford B. Hayes, who became President of the United States after the war, was under Hunter's command and recorded in his diary the events of June 12, 1864: "General Hunter burns the Virginia Military Institute. This does not suit many of us. General Crook, I know disapproves. It is surely bad. . ." (Couper, v.III 34). As Foote explains, Hunter's burning of the Institute was only the grandest act of his destruction. He also allowed his troops to burn and loot private homes and to ransack the Washington College library, even though the college itself had no real part in the Confederate war effort (v. III 310).

Margaret Junkin Preston was one of the witnesses to the burning of the Institute as well. In her diary, she enters for June 12 that

"they set fire to the Institute about nine o'clock; the flames are now enveloping it; the towers have fallen; the arsenal is exploding as I write. . .Gen. Hunter has ordered the burning of all the V.M.I. professors houses. Mrs. Smith plead for hers to be spared on account of her daughter who lies there desperately ill; that alone saved it. Hunter has his headquarters in it. . ." (190-91).

After Hunter finished in Lexington he headed South where he was eventually turned back by Jubal Early at Lynchburg and forced to retreat into West Virginia (Boatner 419).

Upon returning to Lexington, Smith found the Institute in ashes. In his July report to the Board he left little doubt as to his feelings about the burning: "On the Sabbath morning of June 12 the beautiful buildings erected by the liberality of the State for her favorite military

school were made a mass of ruins by the order of Major General D. Hunter. . .after having been sacked by his lawless and rapacious soldiery" (Board of Visitors Report, July 15, 1864).

Smith goes on to fill in details on the extent of the destruction:

"Every species of public property was removed or wantonly destroyed; and among the most serious losses are to be named our valuable library--the accumulated care of twenty-five years. . .Our hospital was rifled of all of its most valuable medical stores and was then burnt. . .The families of Colonels Williamson and Gilham were required by rude officials [to evacuate their homes]. . .and the torch was applied. . .Every public document connected with the operations of the Institute, found in my office, . . .was destroyed or removed. . .The bell attached to our public clock was taken down and removed. . ."

Smith's ire continues:

"Even in Civil War, Oxford and Cambridge were alternately held by the contending armies; but their halls, their courts, their libraries and their archives were preserved, and still remain, to show how civilization may ameliorate the rigors of war. . ."

In his Virginia Military Institute: Its Building and Rebuilding, Smith concedes that Hunter's destruction of VMI "is a convincing proof of the estimate formed by the U.S. authorities of the importance of the services of the Institute in defense of the South." But he still felt that burning the Institute's library and classrooms and painting obscenities on its walls was unnecessary (206-7). In a sense, Smith's anger at Hunter is reminiscent of the anger many Georgians felt in the wake of Sherman's march to the sea. This anger was borne from the suffering and loss of property that came with the war, "the collective experiences of the southern people" as C. Vann Woodward terms them (Burden 16). In turn, these experiences led to a feeling of "difference" from the rest of America, a "difference" that VMI would use to mould institutional distinctiveness as well.

After the evacuation of Richmond in early April 1865, the cadets scattered to their homes. With the reopening of the Institute on October 16, 1865, Smith began use of the remaining buildings on campus for classrooms and barracks (Lyle 110-11). The war was over



but the many personal battles to be fought during Reconstruction to secure VMI's rebuilding were only beginning. Smith set to work immediately in designing a new barracks for the cadets, having told the Board of Visitors in September 1865 that he would hire men to help in the massive reconstruction effort who could "rest their prospects upon the hope of success" (Smith 208). The reconstruction of Virginia and of VMI had begun.

## Conclusion

If Kuh and Whitt are correct in positing that with distinctive colleges we can see the "the college president as the symbolic embodiment of the institution" (72), then surely VMI had lived through the war only to reestablish many of the same attributes it possessed before the war--duty to family and country, honor, and sacrifice. For if VMI came away from the end of the war with one major advantage over many other organizations in the South, it was the continuity of its leadership. Smith was still Superintendent and his concept of the college still provided the impetus for its operations. The Virginia Military mission was still carried in the head of its first and only leader and had sustained the war intact.

What Smith could not foresee, though, was the way that the war had changed VMI in ways beyond his control. Now, with New Market and with the burning of the Institute behind them, the students had a stake in the VMI "story" too, and they were bent on telling this story in their own words. No longer could Smith or the government he served control every aspect of the Institute's operations, every aspect of its traditions and allegiances. The cadets had now bought into the VMI culture mostly because they had represented its ideals on the field at New Market and in the trenches at Richmond. They were the last group to join the faculty, administration, and state officials in a shared vision of the school's past, present, and future. At the same time they would begin to alter this vision and the other members in this elite fraternity would be forced to permit the alterations.

In a sense, then, Virginia Military's weightiest claim on history came at the expense of the cadets' blood and bravery at New Market. In one day, the school's mission had been transformed into a legacy that, through mythology, memorialization, romanticization--call it what you will--soon took on the hue of a campus ideology that informed saga. And from this saga would come distinctiveness. New Market had taken VMI "out of history" and placed it squarely "into history" (Warren 438). Virginia Military had reserved a place in the panorama of the American experience that had virtually forced distinctiveness upon it. As W.J. Cash writes, "four years of fighting. . .had left these Southerners far more self-conscious than they had been before, far more aware of their difference and of the line which divided what was southern from what was not" (106). VMI knew the "difference;" it had lived it. And no man affiliated with the Institute since has ever been allowed to forget it.

## CHAPTER FIVE: IDEOLOGY, SAGA, DISTINCTIVENESS--1866 TO 1890

The American Civil War affected Virginia Military in much the same way that it affected other southern social institutions--by shaping a cultural identity based on difference. Defeat had brought little shame to most southerners. In fact, defiance of what staunch secessionist Edmund Ruffin had called in his suicide letter "the vile Yankee race" was stronger than ever. What southerners could not win on the battlefield--chiefly, verification of cultural righteousness-- they would win by romanticizing their past, which of course could never face defeat. As E. Merton Coulter theorizes, southerners may have surrendered at Appomattox, "but they never thought of surrendering their honor" (Reconstruction 27), that concept of "doing the right thing" within the expectations of one's culture (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor xv).

In this sense, then, the South had retained its beliefs but not the outward manifestations of the belief system. Slavery, a highly stratified social caste, and the need to prove honor on the battlefield were gone. Instead, southerners would graft their new experiences, created from the tensions of Reconstruction, onto their old beliefs, thus formulating an ideology based on the Old South but applied in the "post-bellum" South. Paul Gaston terms this ideology, this systematic way of looking at the world, "the New South Creed" (2). Ideals from the Old South, notably the honor code for white males, combined with the need for social renewal to form a cultural ideology that clung tenaciously to a romanticized past in the face of monumental social change. Reconstruction and the bitterness it fostered ensured that while the South would change, it would do so begrudgingly and even then only

by incorporating aspects of what it saw as its "heroic" past and its ultimate triumph--the fight to save honor that had become a bloody, four-year war.

While many northerners felt that the South clung to elements of its past out of sheer hatred of change precipitated by the "Yankee race" or out of stubbornness, southerners knew that the real reason was an incredible psychological fear of the unknown, of having no real identity in the face of cultural annihilation. As W.J. Cash writes, "like many another people come upon evil days, the South in its entirety was filled with an immense regret and nostalgia; [it] yearned backward toward its past with passionate longing" (127). Moreover, this desperate clawing for some semblance of cultural pride and identity led to the romanticization, idealization, and memorialization of the "Confederate war hero":

"Every boy growing up in this land now had continually before his eyes the vision, and heard always in his ears the clamorous hoofbeats, of a glorious swashbuckler, compounded of JEB Stuart, the golden-locked Pickett, and the sudden and terrible Forrest. . . forever charging the cannon's mouth with the southern battle flag" (124).

The similarities between this characterization and VMI's memorialization of the New Market cadets and the romanticization of the "Stonewall" Jackson legend after the war are striking. VMI, too, was looking for a heritage on which to hang its institutional identity and not unlike the rest of the South, it looked to the War and to the antebellum days with special longing. After all, "with the antebellum world and for that matter the heroism of the war, too, removed to the realm of retrospect, the shackles of reality. . . fell away altogether" (Cash 127).

Thus, VMI's postwar experiences mimic the developments in larger southern society in many ways. Surely the Institute had to face change--its entire physical plant was in ruins, its student body had been scattered to the four winds, its financial situation was precarious at best and hopeless at worst, and it had incurred the specifically targeted wrath of the government in Washington that now controlled the government in Richmond. In the face of

these daunting prospects, the Institute did what most southerners were doing: it looked backward to capture an essence of what it had been, reran in its institutional mind's eye over and over the cadets' heroic efforts in the war (New Market, of course), and created an institutional ideology that helped ease the evils of Reconstructive change and explained how life could go on without the comfort of the old ways. Henry James noted, ". . .this reversion of the starved spirit to the things of the heroic age of the four epic years, is a definite soothing salve'" (Woodward, Origins 157). This ideology, based on the school's historical experiences during the Civil War and linked with the Institute's ongoing academic/military mission, created an institutional saga, an embellished rendering of organizational development over time (Clark 235). Naturally, saga is historical in nature and VMI's unique history came from its actions in the Civil War--its "claim to a place in history" (Clark 254). As the Institute replayed the story of this saga to itself during these years, it recognized its own uniqueness--not unlike the South itself within the national context--and thus its distinctiveness as a college. In a very real way, the past had become present at VMI because the past was all that was left as a guide for the trials of the present and for an uncertain future.

### **Clark's Taxonomy**

Burton Clark's theory on the development of institutional saga and distinctiveness is a critical component to the thesis of this study and has been repeated often in the course of the preceding four chapters. Needless to say, some of it bears a brief rehashing here again, especially in relationship to the Virginia Military experience. Prior to the Civil War, one can attribute three of Clark's five critical components in the development of distinctiveness to the Institute: 1. administrative and faculty dedication to the mission of the institution (Clark 246-248); 2. the development of a unique curriculum or "program core" (248-250); and, 3. the development of a social base external to the college (250-252). By the close of the Civil War, the Institute had at last included in its fold of followers the students, and with their support

of the unfolding VMI saga, came a student subculture supportive of the VMI mission and heritage (Clark 252-53). The last component in Clark's taxonomy, and certainly the most difficult to define through institutional practices, came after the Civil War: institutional ideology (253-55). Essentially, Clark defines institutional ideology as a common way of looking at a college's self-image and of explaining this image to those outside the college:

"self-image is imposing and unified. . .and the practices that support it and give it credence spill over the boundaries of the campus, offering a picture of the institution to which outsiders react before forming their own definitions" (255).

Moreover, "ideology is carried in a generalized memory culture expressed in dozens of ways in everyday life" (254). This ideology, by "imposing" a common reading of institutional heritage, leads to the birth of institutional saga, which, like the ideology that preceded it, "is reflected in nearly all segments of an organization in a highly integrative way" (255). And, of course, "the phenomenon of organizational saga is the central ingredient in the making of a distinctive college" (8). Between 1866 and 1890, Virginia Military Institute developed an institutional ideology based on its Civil War experiences and its antebellum mission. This development took the form of near continuous recounting of organizational history and the memorialization through art, architecture, curricular development, and formal institutional ceremonies. By 1889, ideology had clearly led to an understanding of saga and to the knowledge among those affiliated with VMI that its was indeed distinctive in nature.

### **Distinctiveness Defined**

Distinctiveness is at best a subjective, somewhat nebulous concept--one of those "I know it when I see it" concepts. **Perhaps we can define it best as the aura surrounding near total and absolute uniqueness borne from an equally unique history.** This is closely related to saga, which Clark sees as the understanding of unique historical development but not necessarily the emotional understanding of what its connotes within

context. **Saga is the "understanding" of unique development (Clark 235); distinctiveness is the state of being that emanates from saga and that those on campus see and feel in a thousand myriad ways and that those off campus who were once on campus see and feel through memory. In short, distinctiveness is the state that comes with having saga.** In what has become today a hackneyed expression but which is quite appropriate for purposes here, these colleges are "special" (Clark 258). They are unlike all others, despite the fact that they may have similarities with other colleges (much like the similarities between VMI and the Citadel, or Hampden-Sydney, for instance).

Townsend, Newell, and Wiese, in their monograph, Creating Distinctiveness, define the concept as "the phenomenon resulting from a common set of values that shape institutional activities and unite key constituencies, both internal and external" (10). I think one flaw with this definition is its inability to explain what constitutes this "phenomenon." There must exist in any distinctive institution an emotional tie to the institution that comes from this "common set of values" (what I call the institutional ideology). Moreover, this emotional tie to an saga must include faculty, administrative, student, and some external valuation. The academic mission of an institution must be clearly defined and clearly unique, if not selective in nature. The faculty must buy into this mission with heart, soul, and sometimes pocketbook and the administration must keep the mission in front of the faculty, students, alumni, and other interested external parties as a shining vision to follow into the future. The students must hold a stake in the saga of their school, for it is "their school" as much as anyone else's. They must share the common values--the ideology--that helps the college recognize its unique saga. There must be an element of elitism to a distinctive college, an idea shared by those connected with the institution that the college is "better" than all others, for whatever reasons (Townsend, Newell, and Wiese xv). Townsend, Newell, and Wiese sum up the necessary historical and contextual aspects of distinctiveness in the following way:

"We argue that institutional distinctiveness is usually a slowly emerging phenomenon that develops as institutional activities increasingly reflect educational values strongly held by senior administrators and faculty. This distinctiveness is maintained if sufficient external constituencies also share these values and perceive the college or university to hold them clearly in comparison to other colleges and universities" (13).

A shared sense (ideology) of unique institutional history (saga) leads to an emotional tie among all concerned with the college that it is elite, superior, or "special" in some way because of its saga. This is distinctiveness and VMI has had it from the late 1880's to the present day.

### **Hypothesis**

From 1866 to 1890, the Virginia Military Institute formulated an institutional ideology, a commonly understood self-image and shared perception of how this image related to society, based on its own historical experiences. VMI formulated this ideology primarily as a reaction to a soured relationship with state government during the years of Reconstruction, 1865-1877, and because of the virtual dismantling at the hands of the Reconstructionists of the culture in which it was founded and survived prior to 1865. VMI's was and is a reactionary ideology, conservative in nature and inimical to change. It was and is an ideology that reveres the past and conserves the past in the present as a way of understanding the world through time. Via this institutional ideology, the Institute had arrived at a "sense of saga" (Clark 9) by the Sesquicentennial Celebration of 1889. Simultaneous with this realization came the birth of institutional distinctiveness, the aura that accompanies near complete institutional uniqueness.

### **Organization**

This chapter will follow the same organizational pattern as chapters three and four: government relations, academic affairs, student affairs, community relations, and architecture and facilities. Each subsection will proceed chronologically from 1866 through 1890, the year



after Francis Smith's resignation as Superintendent and the Institute's sesquicentennial. Unlike other chapters, though, the overwhelming emphasis here will rest upon academic affairs. As with other chapters, "academic affairs," as construed in this chapter, relates to the functions of the Institute related to instruction and learning, whether part of the formal curriculum or not. Primarily because of the centrality of instruction and learning to the core identity of a college, it is these areas where documents are most revealing of the development of institutional ideology and the attendant birth of saga and distinctiveness.

Moreover, after the war, VMI's emphasis as an institution truly became more academic, owing to the lack of support from a sometimes hostile state government for a military college and to VMI's own realization that the military component of its mission was largely instructional and no longer useful for producing soldiers for the state. For this reason, as well, the academic affairs section carries the burden of the thesis for this chapter.

### **Government Relations**

Virginia's postwar status as something akin to a Federal territory proved frustrating to the proud Virginians in a number of ways. First, their long tradition of self-government with state leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and Robert Lee's father, Henry Lee, had been replaced by a government under Francis Pierpoint, war-time Governor of the new state of West Virginia, formed when several Virginia counties refused to secede (Coulter, Reconstruction 31). Pierpoint's government had been recognized by the Lincoln administration during the war and Andrew Johnson honored this recognition. Johnson's troubles with the Radical Republicans in Congress, though, brought an end to the Lincoln-created governments in the southern states (119). Vengeance-minded Republicans were deeply disturbed by the election of former Confederates to the statehouses in Virginia and in other states and were particularly angered

by the Virginia General Assembly's rejection of the 14th Amendment, which sought to give blacks equal protection under the law and the right to vote (Rubin 138-39).

With Johnson facing possible impeachment, "Congress had set up new state governments, because, as it claimed, the Johnson states were illegal and did not protect life and property" (Coulter, Reconstruction 139). As a result, Virginia became "Military District Number 1." Congress placed it under martial law under the direct control of the military governor. The old state legislature was thrown out. Congress had effectively eradicated the ability of the Old Dominion to elect its own ex-Confederate officials and had killed the policy of the white-only vote, both of which had "showed distinctly the determination of the South to uphold its traditions" (36). Radical political change had come to Virginia.

Virginia Military felt the pangs of this change. Its strongest defender in Richmond, Adjutant General William Richardson, found himself out of office and thus no longer an ex officio member of the VMI board when the new Pierpoint government came into power (Couper, v. III 129). The Institute knew not what tack the state would take in regard to the its future. Understandably, there was considerable consternation about whether the Institute would still receive vital state funding. Fortunately, the lull between the election of the "old guard" (in 1866) in the legislature and the forced changes in the General Assembly at the hands of the Radical Republicans (in 1868) gave the Institute time to reconstitute its ties with a surprisingly cooperative state government. Pierpoint was generally supportive of education in Virginia and that support even extended to VMI. Happily for the Institute, too, Pierpoint reappointed Richardson to his Adjutant General's position in April of 1866 and his able stewardship of the school's requests to the capitol could continue (Lexington Gazette and Banner 3). This period before the true hardships of reconstruction began gave Virginia Military the time it needed to reflect on its position within a state that had suffered most of

any state during the war and afforded the school a chance to relearn its lines before the enemies it knew were waiting in the wings made yet another entrance on stage.

One sure way to remain in the favor of the state was to make the school appear useful to government needs. VMI had always prided itself on its usefulness to the state, albeit in a mostly military way. After the war, proving this utility became a matter of institutional life and death. Superintendent Smith must have been relieved, then, when the state agreed to contract VMI to conduct a "geographical and geological survey of the State. . ." (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 3, 1867). At least for now, VMI was still on friendly terms with Richmond, so friendly, in fact, that the Board of Visitors decided to tempt fate in early 1868 by requesting armaments for the cadets (Board of Visitors Minutes, January 30, 1868). The request was ultimately denied (Richardson to Smith, July 10, 1868, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1868), but clearly Smith and the Board felt comfortable in dealing with the Pierpoint government, especially with a friendly General Assembly to back them up.

But this good will was not to last. In his history of VMI entitled The Virginia Military Institute: Its Building and Rebuilding, Superintendent Smith notes that around January 1868, a constitutional convention, composed of "one-third white republicans, one-third colored republicans, and one-third only. . .conservatives" (219), met to decide the future of Virginia's state government. The conventioners' hostility toward VMI was overt, likely stemming from its close ties to the Confederacy and to the old order. One of their resolutions must have seemed frightening in its terseness: "Resolved, that the Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute be required to show cause why the property known as the Virginia Military Institute should not be obliterated" (Smith, VMI 219).

Smith was called before the subcommittee of the Convention that had drafted the resolution to give a response. In a case of supreme irony in light of VMI's troubles in the 1990's, Smith submitted that "if the State would turn the property over to the professors, they would pay its debts, and work the institution" (Smith, VMI 220). Needless to say, Smith had no real reason to believe that an already beleaguered faculty could run the institution on its own or pay its debts; his response was a bluff. But he followed it up by pointing out to the conventioners that "looking at the work which the representatives of the State had before them. . . would it not be wiser to throw every energy into it, that the school might be made an agent to aid the State in this work of restoration?" Smith also noted that the Institute was thinking of asking Commodore Matthew Maury to join the faculty to direct the recently contracted Physical Survey of Virginia (220). To the superintendent's relief, the subcommittee bought this rather tried and true excuse for continuing to fund VMI and the school was again saved from extinction at the hands of its detractors (221).

However, this scare was to cause a change in attitude at VMI. No longer was the Institute the darling of state government--or any government for that matter. The scrape with the constitutional convention was the first of two major setbacks for VMI in its dealings with government during this period. The second would be the Institute's inability to secure designation as Virginia's landgrant institution. These events required VMI to rethink its mission and heritage in light of a changed relationship with an organization that had played a key role in establishing both of these components of institutional identity. Forced to prove self-worth or face "obliteration," Virginia Military naturally took a defensive posture. No longer able to trust state government, its greatest ally since 1839, the school turned to the one entity it knew it could trust: itself. From this point in early 1868, VMI began to turn inward, to become introspective as an institution in the face of hostile external forces. If no one else would respect its unique mission, VMI itself would. This introspection soon prompted the need

to extol institutional virtues and history as a defense against forces that were openly hostile to the society from which these virtues and history emanated. Without a strong mission of state service, either military or academic, to tie it to the present or to the future, VMI fell back on its past to find its institutional identity. Of course, in losing the closeness of state government, VMI also gained a measure of autonomy that was to allow it the freedom to discover a "sense of saga" and to explore its own distinctiveness.

The second blow came soon. As Smith notes, Pierpoint recommended that Virginia Military receive one-third of the funds generated through the Morrill Act of 1862 and thus gain Landgrant designation (Smith, VMI 222). The University of Virginia and Hampton Institute, the new school for blacks, were to share the remaining one-third each. The legislature, however, saw otherwise. In an action that clearly represented the reconstruction general assembly's contempt for Virginia's existing higher education institutions--especially the schools that symbolized the Old Dominion's ties with antebellum southern culture, VMI and the University of Virginia--the legislators voted to use two-thirds of Virginia's share to create a new college in Blacksburg (Virginia Tech) and to give the remaining one-third to Hampton (222). Smith was outraged and his words reveal the new attitude the Institute was to take:

"It is difficult to comprehend how such strong claims upon the gratitude and support of the State could have been set aside, and a new institution established. The disappointment was great. But as the Virginia Military Institute had resumed its operations upon the principle of *self-reliance* (Smith's emphasis), the spirit became more resolute to move forward in the work which seemed plainly before it" (223).

The Superintendent's language symbolizes well the anger and fear that the Institute's leaders felt at their abandonment at the hands of the state. The emphasis Smith places upon "self-reliance" is important as a demarcation of the value the Institute now saw in its own internal functions and heritage. This attitude would foster the rapid development

of an institutional ideology and the concomitant realization of internal saga and distinctiveness in the face of outside adversity.

In the meantime, Smith and Richardson were pursuing yet again the possibility of securing arms with which the cadets could train. Again the response from Washington was negative. William Tecumseh Sherman, now the commander of the United State Army, wrote Smith on May 28, 1870, explaining in rather plain language that "these matters raise up old prejudices of the War, and you had better let the matter sleep till the times change" (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1870). Clearly, VMI's successes for the Confederacy during the War were coming back to haunt it during Reconstruction. Despite their best efforts to revive it, Smith and Richardson were soon forced to conclude that the primacy of the military mission had been lost forever. The immediacy of an applied mission--the provision of officers for the militia or a standing national army--no longer existed. Academics, not military training, would form the core of the Institute's curriculum from this time forward. Sherman's refusal also represented an external roadblock to Virginia Military's ability to recultivate elements of its old mission with the world outside the barracks' walls. In response, the Institute would recultivate these elements internally, "yearning back" to halcyon days of glorified utility to the state. Thus, government censure had become the primary motivation for both VMI's new introspective character and the institutional ideology based on the exploits of the past that grew out of this introspection.

Some improvement in the commonwealth's political future came with the readmission of Virginia's representatives to the United States Congress on January 26, 1870 (Rubin 142). As Louis Rubin comments, "the years of military Reconstruction were over. . ." (142). However, the rule of the "carpetbaggers" in the South was just beginning. The Republicans were to control the government in Richmond and in Washington for another seven years and

the suppression of the southern conservatives (naturally, leaders of the antebellum governments and ex-Confederates) continued for the remainder of this period. In his annual report to the Board of Visitors and to the General Assembly, Smith seems somewhat relieved that the tempests in the political environment were weakening:

"This report closes a most eventful period in the history of the Virginia Military Institute. With the restoration of civil government to our State, we gladly recognize the close of those anxieties which give insecurity to operations of the Institution. . ." (Superintendent's Report, June 23, 1870, Board of Visitors Reports, 1870).

He goes on to add that the Institute was enrolling "upwards of 350 cadets" for the upcoming academic year.

The Republican regime in Richmond had not been friendly to the Institute. Identified as part of the "old guard," VMI spent most of the next decade treading on egg shells, desperately avoiding any outward sign of disagreement with Richmond. The Institute could think what it wished within its own walls, but, in order to receive vital state funds, Smith and the Board were forced to play along with the forces in power. The game was not an easy one for men who had once held that power themselves.

The lasting legacy of the problems with the state came in the form of financial debt. The Richmond government was not willing to simply grant VMI the money it required for the immense task of rebuilding the campus. Instead, it agreed to consider loans. As a result, the Board of Visitors decided to petition the General Assembly to "borrow" \$60,000 from the state (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 5, 1870). However, the state itself was in no small need of loans for its own budget and delayed action on the petition until December 1874 (Couper v. III 337). The Assembly passed the bill, but was unable to follow through because of a rapidly worsening fiscal climate (337). VMI was left in the cold. In the interim, the Institute survived on the beneficence of private donations and loans, tuition, and the money netted by decreases

in faculty pay (Board of Visitors Minutes, April 18, 1866). Finally, the General Assembly passed the bill arranging a \$60,000 loan for VMI on March 17, 1876 (Acts, 1876). In his VMI history, Smith sums up the financial situation of these years:

"The total amount received from gifts, proceeds from sale of the bonds of the Institute, from its sale of bonds held by the Institute of the University of Virginia, and net cash from the loan of the State, under the Act of March 17, 1876 (\$48,000), was \$125,000, leaving the sum of \$108,931.48 as the amount contributed by the school itself in aid of the work of restoration. . ." (VMI 232-33).

The end of Reconstruction had come in 1877 in the wake of Rutherford B. Hayes' election as President in 1876. The election hinged on a bargain between the Conservative southern Democrats and the northern democrats, both of whom wanted the Republicans out of the White House. The South would regain the ability to set up its own governments in the manner it chose and in turn, it would vote in block for Hayes. Hayes was elected in 1876; white governments were back in power in the South by the following year (Coulter, Reconstruction 319; Woodward, Burden 105).

The nature of the new white government in Virginia was not what many southern nationalists had in mind. According to Smith, the years just after Reconstruction were the most worrisome. "The most critical years of the school were those of 1880 and 1881. By the State election in the fall of 1881, a revolution was made in the political status of the State, and a new party, the Readjuster Party came into power. . ." (VMI 233). The Readjusters were about doing just that: readjusting the political balance in the state. They were less radical in their demonstrative push for change than the Republican regime had been, but they were determined to win friends for Virginia in Washington and that meant catering to change-oriented interests in the North. They felt that to end the legacy of Reconstruction in Virginia and to allow the state to once again conduct its own affairs without substantial outside influence, the state government needed to show a good faith effort in addressing important



changes favored by Congress (Rubin 147). Equated with modern political labels, the Readjusters were "liberals." To VMI, whose sympathies clearly fell with the conservative, old line Democrats and ex-Confederates, the Readjusters were yet another enemy.

The party's first major action in regard to the Institute was to eradicate completely the sitting Board of Visitors and appoint an entirely new one. Next, they proposed overhauling the administrative processes at VMI, making the department heads supreme within their academic realms and making the Superintendent little more than "Chairman of the Faculty" (Acts, March 3, 1882; Smith, VMI 234-35). The intent was obvious: change the policy-making process at VMI (essentially, the conservative mindset) by changing the policy-makers. In order to obtain an institution that would work with the government rather than follow its own institutional targets, the Readjusters thought these changes necessary. The Board itself got along well with Smith and changes of a form more kind to the Institute were not long in coming. In a relatively short time, the new Board was acting in much the same manner as previous boards and the changes the party leadership sought never really materialized. Of course, the fact that a VMI graduate, William Mahone, was the head of the Readjuster Party may have had something to do with the fact that the government never really modified the essential character of the Institute on any lasting basis (Smith, VMI 233).

In all, then, the party's activities were both blessing and curse. Surely, the new government had meddled internally with VMI, an unforgivable offense that intensified the resentment by and introversion of the Institute's leadership, alumni, faculty, and students. Still, the government had involved the Institute once again (albeit, by force) in state affairs. At any rate, the Readjuster plan to reorganize the Institute fell by the wayside entirely in 1884 with the election of conservative democrats to the General Assembly (Smith, VMI 236).

The Readjuster Board of Visitors was forced to resign and the legislature promptly passed into law funding to wipe out the Institute's debt (Acts, 1884).

But the entire process, from the hostility of the Radical Republicans to the progressivism of the reform-minded Readjusters, had worn thin on Smith. Already well into his seventies, the Superintendent had grown weary of fighting with a legislature he had once courted so successfully. In a March 4, 1884, letter to his son, Frank, Smith confessed that "I can not tell you how tired I am of this business. Days and nights hang heavily upon me. But my duty is to stick to my post, and see the end" (Smith, VMI 238). And this he did, guiding the funding bill through a conservative legislature and securing the financial future of the Institute.

Nevertheless, Smith's words were emblematic of the Institute's ultimate frustration with state government. By the 1870's, Richmond was viewed as the outsider that had to be satisfied rather than the wellspring of regional pride that it had been before and during the Civil War. Since government could no longer be trusted to value the same ideas and ideals as the Institute, VMI would look to itself and to the past for ideological inspiration, not to the state. In the final analysis, then, VMI's soured relationship with the government that had provided it with a mission and a social context for this mission led to the Institute's decision to find mission and context from its own past. From this decision came ideology, saga, and distinctiveness.

### **Academic Affairs**

The bulk of evidence suggesting the emergence of saga and distinctiveness at Virginia Military relates to the Institute's academic affairs--those areas related to the administration and delivery of curriculum, instruction, and the entire process of learning (whether part of the

formal curriculum or not) on campus. This evidence takes several forms: the yearly annual reports of the superintendent and the board, the development of new programs, graduation speeches and ceremonies, special publications about the history of the Institute designed for the enlightenment of the faculty and students, and other types of memorialization of various aspects of the VMI past. Moreover, there is little wonder that these sources are related to the Institute's primary mission as an educational institution; in this way they could affect nearly every person affiliated with the school.

The emergence of a "sense of saga" among parties connected with the Institute and the subsequent creation of distinctiveness came as a result of the development of a definitive institutional ideology formulated during the decades just after the end of the Civil War. This ideology held as its chief component the on-going recounting of and reverence for VMI's own institutional history. Eventually, by the period around the Institute's semi-centennial in 1889, faculty, alumni, administration, and students alike began to see VMI's history as a saga that imbued their institution with organizational distinctiveness. Nowhere is this more evident than in the ceremonies and speeches associated with the July 1889 graduation.

#### The Development of Institutional Ideology: 1866-1877

To call the years just after the Civil War a rebirth for VMI would be a misnomer. The Institute had never really closed its doors and, despite the very real danger that the Reconstruction government in Virginia would shut it down completely, the administration moved ahead as if its troubles were minimal. Smith notes in his annual report of June 25, 1868, that when the cadets returned to the school for the first time on October 18, 1865, they "came not to school, but to their 'Alma Mater' (Smith's emphasis) (Superintendent's Report, 1868). The Superintendent saw the Institute as manifesting an emotional response for its students and he was very likely correct in his assumption.

One should not infer from this optimism, though, that the academic affairs of the Institute were unaffected by the events after the war. In fact, the faculty learned very early on in Reconstruction that theirs was to be a hard lot for some time. The Board of Visitors Minutes for April 18, 1866, recorded the Board's decision to "direct an abatement in the salaries of the Superintendent and professors of 33 1/3 per cent per annum" (Board of Visitors Minutes, 1866). Now this was real retrenchment! The Board went on to assure the faculty that they would receive their regular salaries again just as soon as the new barracks and other buildings required for the Institute's continued operation had been renovated or reconstructed (Board of Visitors Minutes, April 18, 1866). But the message was clear: there were no sacred cows. All components of the institution would feel the axe. And yet the faculty seemed willing to accept this deep cut into their already precarious salaries, either because of their commitment to the institution or because of their inability to find work elsewhere or perhaps as a combination of both factors. There is no record extant of faculty resignations as a result of the pay policy.

At the same time, Smith was already at work attempting to secure vital landgrant funding from the state. In his Report of June 27, 1866, he recounts the history of VMI relating to those academic areas affected by Morrill, the first of many such historical recollections that one sees during this period. Moreover, Smith realizes VMI's unique academic character provides "the distinctive education demanded for. . .important industrial pursuits" (Superintendent's Report, June 27, 1866). Smith sees the Institute's "distinctive" academic character, at least within this narrow scope, as one part of the VMI history. Soon this vision will permeate all academic programs and reach far beyond the "industrial" heritage of VMI.

The first priority for everyone was to continue the academic activities of the Institute. Smith tells us that as a result of this policy "accommodations were in readiness by the 1st of

September, 1866, for 150 cadets. . ." (VMI 217). More importantly, the cadets showed up, revealing their loyalty (or that of their parents) to the Institute. Only 18 had shown up the previous year in the Fall (Superintendents Report, June 27, 1866). Thus, VMI could open in the "regular session of 1866-67 with a full military organization, with lecture rooms, mess hall, and other appointments under imposing ceremonies" (217).

One such "imposing ceremony" was the reinauguration of a statue of Washington that was to stand (again) in front of the barracks. Hunter had removed the statue during his pillage of the Institute in 1864, but the Institute had secured its return. The occasion featured John Letcher, a native Lexingtonian, former war-time governor, and president of the VMI Board of Visitors, as a keynote speaker. Letcher's lengthy speech was little short of a full explanation for and defense of the secession cause and Virginia's role within that cause. This oration became something of a jumping off point for VMI's post-war years. It placed the weighty events of a war in which the Institute had played a prominent role within an historical context that the institution's friends both understood and favored. It told the Institute that it, like Letcher himself, had "no apology to make, no excuse to offer, for any . . . official acts" and that the Confederate army and its leaders showed "more heroism, more devotion, more courage" than any men in "the history of the world" (Couper, v.III 138-39). These words represent again the tendency of many southerners to look back to better times in the face of Reconstruction. They helped ensure that Virginia Military would do the same through the framework of its institutional ideology.

Soon the Institute's longstanding popularity in southern society coupled with its applied academic mission metamorphosed into surprising success in the face of Reconstructionist adversity. New programs in mineralogy and in modern languages revealed the Institute's ongoing commitment to subject matter relevant to society, not just to the

classicist (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 1 and 3, 1867). Moreover, post-war success led to the Board's decision to repay the faculty for the one-third of their salary sacrificed in the name of rebuilding the campus (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 4, 1867). But through these seemingly progressive developments, the elements of the VMI ideology remained intact. In July 1868, the Board agreed to hire Matthew Fontaine Maury as the head of the newly formed Department of Physics (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 2, 1868). Maury was more than a qualified physicist; he was the "retired" chief admiral of the Confederate navy and his appointment, along with G.W.C. Lee's in late 1865, endowed VMI with two high-ranking Confederate military officers on faculty. Their retainment hardly seems coincidental. First, VMI wanted to associate itself with men of this background and second, men of this background could only secure employment at places such as VMI (of which there were few left in the South). Maury and Lee were tangible links to VMI's own heritage and thus living expressions of the Institute's historically based ideology. In a sense, they served the same purpose to the faculty as the New Market cadets served to the students: ties to a nobler time. Maury, Lee, Smith, Preston, Williamson, Gilham--the 1868 VMI Official Register reads like a who's who of academics in Confederate uniform (12-13).

Official sanction of an ideology based on these men and that for which they stood was not long in coming. At the July 4, 1870, commencement ceremonies, poet John Barron Hope read his stirring eulogy for the New Market cadets and the Confederacy entitled, "Memorial Poem" (Edwards 163). This work is one of the first positive signs of an emerging ideology built around the Battle of New Market. Barron's words are heroic, sentimental, and most importantly emotional about VMI history:

"The dust of a long march is on their brows,  
And though they form beneath a withering fire,  
They need no battle speaker to arouse  
Their splendid courage, or their hearts inspire;  
As comrades fall, it only rises higher.

Shipp goes down wounded, but with flaming eyes  
The line sweeps on--"Avenge him!" thundered Wise" (81).

Barron's verse-making may leave a little to be desired, but his words give us an excellent example of the Institute's ability to see its own history in heroic, romanticized terms. Note that Barron specifically mentions Shipp and Wise, two real VMI graduates who fought at New Market and whose names conjure real connections with institutional history for alumni, faculty, and current students. Importantly, too, Barron's romanticization of VMI's war-time exploits is another representation of a common sentiment about VMI's heritage, namely, that it was honorable, heroic, and tempered by love of state and school (what Barron terms "Mother-State and Mother-School") (82). Barron rambles on for several pages, essentially rhyming the same theme over and over: here are the names of the dead and here is why they died. If nothing else, mentioning specific names over and over is in itself a symbolic gesture. When set in heroic verse, VMI men and their story take on a whole new meaning imbued with fame and a lasting sense of self-worth. They become abstract ideals.

Barron also explains to the Institute what the death of the New Market cadets represents to the school:

"Sleeping, but glorious  
Dead in fame's portal.  
Dead, but victorious,  
Dead, but immortal!  
They gave us great glory,  
What more could they give?  
They have left us a story,  
A story to live--" (83).

And, of course, a synonym for a "living story" is a saga. The cadets had indeed given their school "glory" and in doing so they had given VMI its own history "to live" in the form of an institutional saga. Barron saw this in 1870. It would take the rest of the Institute (except for

Smith) a while longer yet. First, the Institute would need to understand the story in a common way via an ideology of its own making.

Another step in the development of this ideology came around the same time in the form of Smith's annual report (Superintendent's Annual Report, June 23, 1870). Here, Smith ensured that another legacy of the VMI story lived on through a commonly recognized, officially sanctioned memorialization effort.

#### "Stonewall Jackson Memorial Fund"

"This fund has been organized for the purpose of providing some suitable memorial at the Virginia Military Institute in honor of Lt. General T.J. Jackson, who, for nearly fourteen years, held the chair of Natural and Experimental Philosophy and Artillery Tactics in this institution, and whose brilliant career and heroic death during the late war have shed a lustre upon the school, which has been recognized throughout the civilized world. . ." (Superintendent's Report 1870).

With the removal of Jackson's death of some seven years, the Institute seems to have gained perspective on its connection with the immortal "Stonewall." Smith reveres him not simply as a great southern military leader, but as a figure connected to the lasting historical fame of the Institute. Jackson's life and death are components in the VMI story as well as the story of the Confederacy and as such they must be safeguarded--memorialized--for successive generations. In this way, Jackson's meaning and importance to Virginia Military, as seen by the Institute's leadership, can be preserved through time without the danger of change. The Institute memorialized Jackson in another way in the Summer of 1870. The Board asked Smith to "finance. . . a history of the Institute and biography of T.J. Jackson" as a means of promoting the "interest of the Institute" (Board of Visitors Minutes, July 5, 1870). All concerned saw the two subjects as intrinsically linked. By this point, Jackson had been added to the memory of the New Market cadets in the VMI time capsule. Both memories now claimed a common rendering at the hands of a peculiar institutional ideology.



Also in this report, Smith mentions the implementation of a new academic program, Fine Arts, under the direction of William D. Washington, a painter of some note (Superintendent's Report, June 23, 1870). Despite the fact that the VMI curriculum had long offered drawing courses, the addition of a fine arts department may seem a bit outside the scope of the VMI mission. This was not the case. Smith justified the new program as a way of celebrating Virginia Military's heritage:

"With the laudable desire of preserving and transmitting to those who come after us life-like portraits painted each year of the elites of the Institute, who had fallen in the late civil war, means had been contributed by their relatives and friends to have eight to ten of the portraits painted each year. . ." (Superintendent's Report, 1870).

This act represents two important developments. First, it gives the Institute a tangible way of remembering, preserving for all posterity on canvas, its fallen student-heroes. Again, we see a common depiction of VMI's past. Second, by mentioning the support of "relatives and friends" in this effort, Smith reveals that individuals outside the Institute's direct sphere of influence are perceiving the Institute in much the same way it perceives itself.

By 1870, then, one can certainly argue that the Institute had developed its own institutional ideology, or common way of looking at the world and itself, based on its historical experiences. This ideology sees the world as fallen, dangling on a precipice of meaninglessness below the standards of antebellum and Civil War southern society and in desperate need for recouping the virtues of these eras. The Institute sees itself as an organization that can help recapture these virtues. In other words, VMI's was and is a reactionary ideology, conservative in nature and inimical to change. It was and is an ideology that reveres the past and conserves the past in the present as a way of understanding the world through time. It is also an ideology that sees VMI as an elite institution. Indeed, change wrought havoc with the entirety of southern culture, of which Virginia Military was a prominent player. Too much change, of any kind, was dangerous to the organization's identity, even survival. VMI knew

this because of the destruction of the war and because of the radical policies of Reconstruction. It carries with it these lessons to the present day.

1870 truly became a landmark academic year for the Institute when the Board of Visitors awarded the first baccalaureate degrees at the July graduation (Superintendent's Report, June 23, 1870). This development labelled Virginia Military as something more than a vocational school capable of only applied training. By awarding the baccalaureate the Institute became instantly more collegiate in its mission. The baccalaureate also made VMI more academic in focus, placing it squarely in the centuries old tradition of the classical colleges, despite its unique curriculum. VMI could now call itself a "college," if indeed it ever felt the need to do so. And with collegiate status it could now cultivate collegiate traditions without fear of alienation from institutions that perceived it as vocational and thus unable to develop a college's saga.

The Board of Visitors was intent on keeping the Institute's new ideology alive, too. Art became an important means for insuring this intent. In 1875, the Board noted in passing that the art gallery that the Fine Arts department under Washington (who had died only a year after coming to Lexington) had created should be retained as a way of

"embracing many precious memories of members of the Board of Visitors who were engaged in laying the foundations of the Institute, of distinguished officers of the military and civil services of the State who have passed away in the eventful struggle in which Virginia Military Institute bore so conspicuous a part. . .all contributing to perpetuate virtues so dear to every Virginian" (Board of Visitors Annual Report, July 1, 1875).

The Institute's leadership saw art as a means of "perpetuating" the school's past. Art could also provide a single vantage point from which to view elements of this past. Moreover, it was unchanging in its depiction of people, places, and events. A singular perspective could feed

directly into VMI's institutional ideology, which required the continuous rehonoring of all institutional components to ensure a commonly understood self-image.

In a move that held forth perhaps as much symbolism as the commission of artwork, the Board of Visitors in the same year decided to grant to the cadets who had fought at New Market diplomas (Board of Visitors Minutes, June 24, 1875). These diplomas were to be awarded "honoris causa," or for the sake of honor, but they were not honorary diplomas. They were real degrees. The Board was quite willing at this stage to ensure that all of the New Market cadets were fully recognized graduates of the Institute who could represent themselves to family and friends outside the VMI clique as fully vested members of the alumni. In turn, the Institute could represent these heroes as "graduates"--the kind of men that the VMI experience creates--for eternity. There could be no chance that a New Market cadet, that paragon of the VMI man, could ever turn his back on the Institute. In other words, the Institute wanted all of these men in the fold and if a public relations ploy required the Board to waive academic requirements to affect this end, then so be it. In the view of the Board members, bolstering the VMI heritage was of preeminent importance. In order to survive in a largely introspective state of being, the Institute had to convince itself that its own history could sustain institutional mission and identity. The awarding of diplomas to the New Market cadets was one way of reconstituting this history for use by a new generation of cadets, faculty, and alumni. It also made sure that everyone affiliated with the Institute held a common memory of the bravery and heroism of the Institute during the war.

But the Institute felt compelled to create some lasting legacy to the alumni who had lived through the war, too. For this reason C.D. Walker, a VMI graduate, was commissioned to write "some suitable memorial of the alumni of the . . . Institute" (Superintendent's Report, June 24, 1875). Walker complied by producing a compilation of somewhat gilded verse-like

biographies of certain alumni. With prose such as "His Saviour--his mother--his country!" and "In the case of these boys, how touchingly true it was that the 'bravest were the tenderest'" (Superintendent's Report), Walker idealized the VMI alumni to the extent that their lives became abstract notions of heroism and fealty to alma mater. The VMI story subsumed their individuality using their names to provide a means for carrying forward the glorified past into the traditions of the present and future. To those cadets, alumni, faculty and administrators looking back from 1875, New Market had become something akin to an epiphany for the Institute. And, indeed, the school treated the anniversary date of the battle almost as a religious holiday: May 15 was one of only three holidays built into the academic calendar--the other two were Christmas and Founders' Day (November 11).

As proof of the importance of the Institute's heritage to current cadets, the Institute decided to award two prizes to the top graduates of the Institute in each academic year. In his June 20, 1876, annual report, Smith summarized the history and intent of the Jackson-Hope medals:

"the surplus fund of the Jackson statue fund remaining in the hands of the original donors has been dedicated by the Governor, by the authority of the honored donors, and in execution of their wishes, to be invested and perpetuated as an inalienable and inviolable capital, the annual income from which shall be expended in procuring two prizes of gold, to be engraved and designated as the 'First Jackson-Hope Medal' and the 'Second Jackson-Hope Medal,' respectively, and to be bestowed annually, as awards of merit, upon the two most distinguished graduates of the Virginia Military Institute, in the order of their distinction" (Superintendent's Report, 1876).

Smith fails to explain, however, that Hope was an English Member of Parliament who had "represented the Association which presented to the Commonwealth the statue of Thomas J. Jackson" (Kemper to Smith, May 9, 1876, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, 1876). Moreover, in the Official Register for 1880-81, Smith links the awards to the school's need to keep alive the memory of Jackson: "As long as the Virginia Military stands it will prize, as one of its prerogative distinctions, the peculiar relation which it bears to the history of General

T.J. Jackson" (5). Thus, the awards were a representation of VMI history in the form of academic recognition and as such they tied superior academic achievement to the emerging VMI saga.

Perhaps of equal importance, the medals were engraved with the newly approved motto of the Institute, "*In pace decus, in bello praesidium*" (Honor in peace, protection in war). (Superintendent's Report, June 20, 1876). Here, honor, the concept so important to the development of the Institute's mission prior to the Civil War, is linked with the Institute's application of mission during the Civil War as a guardian for Virginia's interests to form a lasting symbol (motto) by which the Institute can be identified. Institutional ideology based on a reverence for the past plays a role here, too. The notably southern, antebellum concept of honor and the Institute's war-time exploits are both components of the school's history and are seen as informing its future.

#### Recognition of Saga and Distinctiveness: 1878-1890

Because it deals with two specific periods in VMI history in its attention to mission during peace (*pace*) and war (*praesidium*), the VMI motto represents the evolution of mission through time, with all the attendant "embellishment" (Clark 235). In this sense, the motto truly symbolizes the Institute's first recognition of saga--"a mission made total across a system in space and time" (235).

From this point onward, ideology combined with other existing elements of the VMI experience to create saga and finally distinctiveness. Interestingly, the Institute began to reclaim elements of its military mission that were lost after the war as a way to insure inclusion of all the original components of the school's mission. The administration was very careful to preserve historical correctness in the Institute's saga wherever possible. In his

annual report to the Board of Visitors on June 28, 1878, Smith recommended "that the existing regulations in regard to a fully organized encampment for the months of July and August, which have been necessarily suspended since the war be resumed" (Superintendent's Report, 1878). The Superintendent goes on to explain that the military component of the VMI mission is a "distinctive characteristic of the school" and that the "military organization of this school has always given force to its *distinctive* discipline (Smith's emphasis) (Superintendent's Report, 1878). By this stage, Smith had realized that there was indeed something more than unique about his school, something that made it more than just a college. In a day when the entire military machine of the South lay dormant, Smith refused to see his military college as an anachronism. Instead, it was "distinctive." Smith turned the weakness that had probably prevented VMI from becoming a landgrant college--its military history--into an internal strength. He simply refused to allow Virginia Military to see its somewhat antiquated military tradition as anything but a characteristic that perpetuated an "*esprit de corps*."

We see this attitude borne out again in Smith's narrative on the "System of Instruction and Government" in the 1880-81 Official Register. He writes that "The system of instruction and government in the Virginia Military Institute is *distinctive*" (Smith's emphasis) and that "as soon as a young man enters this institution, it assumes over him an entire control, and not only directs his moral and intellectual education, but provides everything required for his personal wants and comfort" (14). Again, Smith used the word "distinctive" to describe the school. Of course, this is not to say that he anticipated Clark's use of the word, but the Superintendent assuredly believed at this point that the unique heritage and mission of his school made it more than just different. No, it is distinctive, connoting a certain elitism. Left unstated by Smith but certainly implied by his language is the idea that the Institute is a superior organization. Moreover, Smith made sure to mention that students are completely

controlled, taken in, if you will, by this "distinctive" culture. Much like political ideologies, VMI's cultural ideology pervaded every aspect of its students' lives.

*The Sesquicentennial: 1889*

Virginia Military's fiftieth anniversary represented more than just a celebration of the school's ability to stay open for so long. It became a symbol of the Institute's success through time, a validation of its mission and heritage. It also became a ceremonial symbol of the school's newly solidified saga and distinctiveness. Here, in no uncertain terms, the Institute looked back over its eventful history and dedicated its entire energy to synthesizing the meaning of this period. Through this introspection, VMI could trace the arc of its mission through time and use the opportunity the Sesquicentennial provided for basking in its own glory. Essentially, 1889 was the year the Institute realized its own distinctiveness. The traditions of the graduation exercises provided a perfect forum for the historical embellishment and the emotional evocation tied to the Institute's distinctive character.

Brooke, in his chapter on "VMI's Sesquicentennial Year" in A Crowd of Honorable Youth, notes that "every effort was made to bring the old classes back, and there was much talk about alma mater and the 'Old VMI'" (83). This was precisely what Smith, the Board, and the Society of the Alumni had in mind. By bringing back VMI's living history, its alumni of all classes including the first one of 1842, the Institute could see before its walls its own history--a history that spanned antebellum Virginia, Civil War Virginia, and Reconstruction Virginia. The alumni became the fruits of VMI's mission as it proceeded from decade through decade. And through their own individual interpretations of a shared experience, the "old classes" informed the new of the VMI saga. After all, they *were* the saga.

The events of the semicentennial were no less symbolic of the Institute's realization of its own saga and distinctiveness than were the attendants. The celebration was marked

throughout by events--speeches, poems, dances--that united VMI men of all ages in an emotional bond whose center was the Institute's saga. J.T.L. Preston, the man who first envisioned the school some 55 years before the semicentennial, wrote a brief history of the Institute that was read at graduation by his son (Couper, v. IV 20). Significantly, this was Smith's final graduation. After nearly fifty years with the Institute, he had tendered to the Board his resignation at the July 1, 1889, Board Meeting (Board of Visitors Minutes, 1889). His final day as Superintendent would be December 31, 1889.

Facing the loss of its one and only leader, the Institute listened to Smith's final speech before the assembled alumni, administration, students, faculty, and parents on the day before graduation. As the central figure in the Institute's existence, he had ensured its survival on more instances than anyone could recall. He had shaped and molded the Institute into a manifestation of his own vision. To many present, he was a personification of the Institute's mission and character. The speech he made at the graduation summed up as well as any other source extant the newly realized triumph of the VMI saga. It was historical in nature, as many of Smith's speeches were, and it condensed into a continuum the school's history. Always the visionary, Smith held the entire scope of the Institute's mission in his mind. His words are proud, moving, poetic in their comparison of the old VMI to the new. They encompass the breadth of fifty years with a vitality that comes with understanding the VMI saga:

"A retrospective of these fifty years presents a proud record. The period embraces an eventful one in the history of our State and country; while circumstances gave peculiar prominence to the work assigned to the Virginia Military Institute. . .

"In 1839, the Virginia Military Institute was not known even by name. In 1889, it has a name and a fame which extend to every part of the civilized world" (Superintendent's Report, June 25, 1889).



Smith continued with a quote from a "distinguished professor of one of our universities" about the importance of VMI alumni in perpetuating institutional saga:

"The occasion will be one of interest to many outside of the large circle of alumni in our state, and beyond its borders. Nothing in the educational history of the South is more striking than the loyalty and devotion of your graduates to their Alma Mater" (Superintendent's Report, 1890).

In looking back, Smith had shown the crowd the arc of time that had transformed mission into saga. Now he, too, was to be a part of that saga. The alumni knew that Smith was resigning. If nothing else, the realization that an era had ended at VMI--50 years of existence and 50 years of able leadership and vision--held an emotional charge. This was Smith's farewell and it was designed to be a part of and to carry forward the overall sentimentality of the occasion. For the first time in the Institute's history, all segments of the Institute sat together, drawn by a common attachment to their Alma Mater and experiencing as a group the emotional tie to their school. They had common experiences as cadets, no matter how many years had separated their attendance. Smith had replicated for them these common experiences in a speech that was also part of the VMI saga.

That evening, the alumni, students, and faculty gathered for the reading of Margaret Junkin Preston's "Semi-Centennial Ode" to the Institute. The poem, read by Edmund Pendleton from the Institute's first class, 1842, served as a capstone experience for the listeners who had already heard Smith's speech. Like most poetry dedicated to VMI, the verse is heroic, sentimental, and romantic. Preston takes 23 stanzas to record the entire history of the Institute, each one carefully constructed to evoke emotion among the alumni. She begins with a petition to "Virginia--Mother Country" (10) and shows how the state became so influential in the events surrounding the Institute's founding. She continues by describing the antebellum years as a time when "With purpose true,/ To State and Country, each eleve/ His prompt and ready service gave/ Where service pledged was due" (16). These were the years

1840 to 1860, when the Institute sought so earnestly to fulfill its mission to the state and to establish its own institutional identity.

Preston then writes of the war, of Jackson's death, and of New Market. Her words are stirring, especially to those men who could very well have known the cadets who died at New Market or who could just as easily see themselves charging Sigel's men. "Lift from the trampled sod,/ Where the harsh hoof has trod,/ Where he has lain,/ Stanard, who fought and fell,/ Mangled with shot and shell,/ Out from the slain" (23). Note that Preston calls for Beverly Stanard to be removed "out from the slain" who were not in the cadets regiment. Stanard's life held an inordinate importance to the Institute. He was not just another "slain" soldier, but a cadet. The poet makes sure to accent the lasting importance of the New Market battle by admonishing the survivors of the war and those who come after them to "Guard, then , the heroes, who/ Dying, having left to you,/ Such a behest. . ." (25). In a sense, the cadets gave their lives to safeguard their homes, but after their deaths, their lives take on the added importance of establishing VMI's claim to historical uniqueness. As individuals, they are forever linked to the event that all alumni recognize as the seminal act in the Institute's saga and the chief reason for its distinctiveness.

After taking great care to list each and every figure influential in building and rebuilding the Institute (27) and in safeguarding its traditions, Preston, in closing, pays special tribute to Smith and to the symbolism of the semi-centennial: "And as to-day, the full fruition/ Of his accomplished aim appears,/ How bright the arch that fronts his vision,/ And spans the toil of fifty years" (30). She leaves little doubt that Smith has provided the common vision that has held together the Institute over the past half-century and that with the celebration of the anniversary, the vision has come to "fruition." In her own way, the poet realizes what the Superintendent has known for some years: VMI is a special place, unlike any other college

in the scope of its difference, because of its history. Moreover, Preston's emotional rendering of the VMI saga fired, in turn, the emotions of the listeners. The celebration had become a joyous acclamation of Virginia Military's distinctiveness. Couper describes the scene after Pendleton finished his reading: "spellbound, now bursting into tumultuous applause, now weeping, they came to the final stanza:

'And now to you, whose bosoms swell  
     With mingled joy and thanks, that ye  
     Are sharers in this Jubilee,--  
 Who like the Greek, look back , and say,  
 Proudly on this Memorial Day--  
 I, TOO HAVE DWELT IN ARCADY  
 Brave sons, who round their mother's knee,  
 Clasp hands in comrade-fealty,--  
     Hail and farewell!" (v. IV 18).

The poem solidified the Institute's realization of its own heritage. Read before a graduation crowd from all over the state and the country, the poet's words represent the first public proclamation of the VMI saga and the distinctiveness that now accompanied this saga.

In the end, the poem also symbolized the Jubilee itself. First, it synthesized in one place at one time for one crowd the VMI saga. Second, it achieved this rendering through an emotional medium that left the attenders with a sense of distinctiveness borne from this saga. Essentially, the Sesquicentennial tied up in a neatly packaged gift to the alumni the entire progression from mission to ideology to saga to distinctiveness. The VMI myth was made whole.

Also, one can see the importance of holding the sesquicentennial celebration at graduation as opposed to Founder's Day--the Institute's true fiftieth anniversary--by reviewing the Institute's activities surrounding the November 11 date. The date was a holiday for the cadets as always. Otherwise, Smith ordered "a salute of 50 guns" be fired "in honor of the day"

(Superintendent's Orders, November 9, 1889). Those were the only signs of the semicentennial date. Holding the "jubilee" simultaneous with graduation was a means of placing the current classes of cadets and the 1889 graduation itself within the parameters of the saga and the distinctiveness embodied by the semicentennial events. The students and the alumni had to be present and they had to share, via the communal ceremony of graduation, their common heritage.

### *Shipp's Appointment and The Founders' Deaths*

General Orders Number 27, December 31, 1889, ended the tenure of Francis Henney Smith as Virginia Military's first superintendent. In his place, the Board appointed Colonel Scott Shipp, long the commandant of cadets and the officer in charge of the corps at the Battle of New Market, as VMI's second superintendent. As Couper notes, Shipp's election "insured a continuity of operation which was gratifying to a large number of the alumni and others who were thorough believers in the type of instruction which had been developed at the Institute in five decades" (v. IV 23). In his first annual report as Superintendent, Shipp mentions that "with the exception of these changes in personnel, the condition of the Institute remains substantially the same as at the date of the last report" (Superintendent's Annual Report, September 25, 1890).

This continuity of leadership, especially in light of Shipp's background, also ensured that the shared vision of VMI's saga, as carefully molded by Smith in the last twenty years or so, would continue. The school's basic conservative ideology and reluctance to change in the face of new developments would gain an even stronger foothold under Shipp--so strong that it would hardly change at all, in any appreciable way, in the coming century. Smith had created the mould, fired the kiln, and produced the original interpretation of the VMI saga; Shipp broke the mould and preserved the original, choosing to reproduce it rather than alter

it. Jennings Wise, in his biography of Shipp, sums up what the new superintendent meant to the Institute:

"The utmost confidence was reposed in him, for his views were well known. His appointment insured that the basic principles upon which the Institute had been founded and to the rigid adherence to which its success had been largely due, would not be abandoned; that no radical changes of problematic effect would result" (Shipp XXX).

If Shipp's appointment brought continuity to an ideology that required, even demanded it, other events of 1890 caused the Institute to include two new components to its expanding saga. On March 21, 1890, Francis Smith died at his home in Lexington, less than three months after resigning the superintendency (General Order No. 14, March 21, 1890, Superintendent's Orders). According to Shipp's order of that date, "the Father and Founder of the Institute" died of a stroke. Smith had been at work on a history of the Institute that he left unfinished (published posthumously as VMI: Its Building and Rebuilding) (General Order No. 14). Suddenly, the man who had endowed the Institute with a singular vision for so long could no longer guide its actions. Smith's vision for the Institute was now in the hands of his successors on the faculty and in the administration and with the alumni. And, indeed, the alumni reacted swiftly to news of the Superintendent's death by publishing a press release for public consumption that rendered a common understanding of Smith's contributions: "his life was interwoven with the most stirring events of the history of this Commonwealth, and has left a lasting impression upon its annals, and upon the lives of its sons" (General Order No. 17, March 24, 1890, Superintendent's Orders). Interestingly, through such eulogies, the Institute was forced yet again to look back over its own history. Shipp, just as his predecessor would have wanted, made sure there existed one sanctioned retrospective that could provide a singular, approved perspective on Smith's life and its impact on the VMI saga. In his first annual report as Superintendent, dated September 25, 1890, Shipp included along with the

report an "In Memoriam" insert that provided an officially sanctioned version of Smith's life (Superintendent's Report, 1890).

Four months after Smith's death, J.T.L. Preston died (July 16, 1890). Preston had virtually willed VMI into existence and he had provided the vision that Smith took over and enlarged. With his passing, the old guard at VMI had vanished. Yet, in the best melodramatic sense, their legacy would continue into successive generations of cadets. They, too, would become part of the Institute's traditions and with their ability to scare future cadets into submission no longer a threat, the Institute's sons were free to idealize them. Smith and Preston had shaped the Institute's saga and had made the school distinctive. Just as important, though, they had also put in place an ideology that sought to keep the interpretation of this saga, and thus the representations of distinctiveness, uniform and unchanged.

### **Student Affairs**

The Civil War had given the cadets at VMI a stake in the future of the Institute and in the way the school used their exploits at Harper's Ferry, New Market, and in the defense of Richmond for its own aggrandizement. After the war, the New Market cadets graduated and became alumni. They were no longer under the control of the Institute's taskmasters (if they really had been at all after charging into a hail of bullets at New Market) and they could exert pressure in regard to the school's lasting ideology and saga without retaliation. They were allies of the administration and faculty in seeing VMI through the turbulent years of Reconstruction and they were the men who showed up at the Semicentennial Jubilee in 1889 to celebrate saga and distinctiveness with the same "Old Spex" they used to revile as cadets. Thus, for the cadets and the alumni, 1866-1890 was a time for exercising a newly won self-expression. As often as not this self-expression took on the raiment of the Institute's own

ideology and made the students partners in the development of saga and the celebration of distinctiveness.

### "Rats"

One of the first components of VMI culture most higher education scholars hear about is the "rat" system, the formally recognized process of initiating new cadets into the VMI system of instruction and the school's overall distinctiveness (VMI Catalog 1992-93 7). According to the 1992-93 catalog, one of the chief aims of the "rat year" (the freshman year) is the promotion of "class unity and the 'brother rat' spirit that result from shared experiences in a stern and challenging environment" (8). Singularity of purpose is a prerequisite for a military school's success and VMI was and is no different. Surprisingly, although upperclassmen have used the word "rat" to describe freshmen since around 1850 or so (H. Wise 117), the formal "rat" system that the present-day administration recognizes and condones did not exist at the time VMI was emerging as a distinctive school in the late 19th century. Certain elements of the "rat" system were critical in establishing and perpetuating saga during these years. However, there is no historical evidence to suggest that they were linked together in the formalized system of education, hazing, and discipline administered by upperclassmen that we have seen over the last 70 years or so. Also, the administration did not sanction the individual elements and specific goals of the "rat" process in anything like the way it does today. If anything, Smith was extremely cautious in avoiding the appearance of hazing (see the Student Affairs section of Chapter 4).

In any case, the use of hazing and the term "rat" increased after the Civil War as the cadets decided to interpret the VMI aura, what Henry Wise calls the "Brother Rat spirit or bond," in their own ways (111). Smith and the administration seemed to have little problem with the whole "rat" process so the cadets came up with their own devices for indoctrinating

the freshmen or 4th classmen. This often included beating and physical harassment of differing kinds but seldom ended in severe violence (H. Wise 57).

Yet we still see little evidence of a formally recognized process of hazing or indoctrination during the "rat year." Instead, the cadets passed on their interpretations of a commonly understood institutional heritage through new student publications, the development of sports teams allied with school spirit, and the organization of fraternities, along with the hazing of "rats." The cadets during this period saw and felt deeply the sacrifices of their brethren during the Civil War and they needed little prompting to see it as extraordinary in nature. Also, they understood that the VMI saga included much more than just students and relied on more than just students for its perpetuation--it included faculty, administrators, government officials, poets whose husbands were on faculty (Margaret Preston), and even the occasional Union General whose only link to VMI was burning it. In other words, VMI's distinctive "spirit" was passed down through successive student classes some time before the appearance of a formal "rat line" (the walking patterns around campus that "rats" are required to use) and in ways different from those used in the line.

Again, this is not to say that the rat system is not an integral part of the passing on of distinctiveness among classes today. It certainly fulfills that role. However, the central question that must be posed by the scholar remains: "Is the rat system as it exists today *essential* for passing on VMI's distinctiveness among the students?" The VMI historian would tell us "no," but qualify it by adding that some form of the "rat" process must exist, since it represents the cadets' own acceptance and interpretation of the VMI saga.

### "Reconstructing" Student Life



For the cadets, the period after the close of the Civil War became a time not only for dealing with the effects of Reconstruction policy on the Institute but also a time for "reconstructing" student life itself. No longer would the cadets tolerate the absolute control that Smith and the faculty had always exerted upon them. They had weathered the rigors of war on their own, and, unlike most of the faculty (including the Superintendent) they had faced enemy fire. Who was to tell them they could not occasionally toss a baseball on the parade ground?

One action of the administration, in particular, brought the issue of student culture home to the Institute--literally. Special Order Number 10, issued by Preston on May 5, 1866, commanded one member of each class at the Institute to travel to New Market and "remove the bodies of the cadets thire (sic) interred, and also at, or near Harrisonburg and Staunton, and convey them to the Institute" (Commandant's Orders, 1866). On May 15, the anniversary date of the New Market battle, the Institute held religious services for the remains of the cadets (Commandant's Orders, May 5, 1866). For the current cadets, this was a recognition on the part of the Institute that the students did matter and that they, too, had a role to play in the perpetuation of VMI's heritage. As Couper notes, the New Market cadets had already been assured by the Institute of a "secure place in V.M.I. history" (v.III 131). He goes on to add that the New Market cadets were a "well defined, although unorganized, society or fraternity at V.M.I." (131). Undoubtedly, all the cadets read this recognition of the student sacrifice, symbolic as it was, as tacit consent for the freeing up of the stranglehold on cadet expression and extracurricular activities. They were quick to follow up on their new found "freedom."

By late 1866, three fraternities were active at the Institute, two of which, Alpha Tau Omega, and Sigma Nu, had been founded by New Market cadets. Students from Washington

College founded the third, Kappa Alpha, and VMI added the second chapter soon afterward (The Bomb, 1885 15). The administration frowned on these organizations and the Board promptly took steps to try and limit their spread among the corps: "No society shall be organized among the cadets without a special license from the Superintendent" (Board of Visitors Minutes, March 23, 1867). This prohibition was to have limited results for the next several years.

Coming on the heels of the fraternities, organized athletics made an appearance on campus for the first time in 1867. Smith had sanctioned the private instruction of boxing and fencing as early as the 1840's, but had never allowed organized sports to play any role in the cadets' VMI experience. Sports could detract from the overall purpose of the Institute to produce citizen-soldiers by taking the cadets away from their academic exercises or from their military drills. Nonetheless, Hugh Walter Fry, a New Market veteran and member of the class of 1867, brought baseball to VMI in the year of his graduation (The Bomb, 1914 144). William Robertson details Fry's recollection that "in those days our military and academic duties could not be interfered with for baseball, and we had little practice. Most of our match games were played with Washington College" (149). Apparently, the administration was willing to concede some forms of extracurricular activity unrelated, even distantly, to the formal curriculum. But why? The fact that Fry was a New Market cadet cannot be underestimated, just as we should not underestimate the linkage between the new fraternities on campus and the New Market cadets. Clearly, the administration was unwilling to risk the dismissal or resignation of these cadets after the war and thus found it expedient to allow them their freedom of expression, albeit on a limited basis. Once ensconced, however, the freedoms accorded the New Market veterans became hard to purge. Baseball, for example, was on campus to stay and its presence would attract other sports; also, despite the stated prohibition against fraternities, it would take Smith and the Board another 18 years to

eradicate fraternities altogether. Part of this new leniency stemmed from the recognition that the students' world after the war was a different one and that as a result so was the world of the college. VMI and Washington College were not the only colleges in the South whose students organized fraternities. As Thomas Dyer points out in the Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, "after the Civil War, southern students, mainly Confederate veterans or military college cadets, organized new fraternities" based on their common heritage (250). In this light, Smith may have been compelled by forces outside his control to allow fraternities and sports to develop at VMI.

In any event, the effects of the New Market cadets on VMI's emerging saga were not solely limited to ceremonies and traditions linked to graduation and New Market Day. They also affected the students' ability to interpret this saga by various means, whether by exercising the freedom to play a sport introduced by a New Market veteran or by organizing fraternities based on the Institute's experiences during the Civil War. Soon, the extracurriculum was even starting to pattern itself on the attempts of the administration and faculty to delineate a unique institutional ideology based on heritage. The Cadet: A Monthly Magazine of Science, Literature, and Art published by and for the students made its debut in March 1871 and included in its first issue an article entitled "Early History of the Virginia Military Institute" (26-30). Another section eulogized William Washington, the recently deceased professor of Fine Arts, while a third updated the cadets on the status of the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Fund (40-42). These students were clearly interested in more than just baseball and boxing. They were intent on expressing a viewpoint on their school's culture and heritage and in making a contribution to the perpetuation of that culture. Thus, while the faculty and the administration busied themselves by recounting VMI's history on a near-continuous basis, the students were doing the same. They, too, were contributing to the development of an institutional ideology. This became even more apparent in the January

1872 issue of The Cadet when the students published "The Cadets at New Market," an ode to the fame and bravery of their fellow cadets (110-111). The decision to include this poem, a form of memorialization not unlike those officially sanctioned by the administration and faculty, represents an act of conserving the past as a way of building ideology and resolidifies the role of the students in creating saga.

However, the administration soon believed that the growing number of fraternities on campus fostered multiple perspectives on VMI culture and detracted from a singular interpretation of the Institute's saga. As Couper explains, the fraternity "system does not. . .work well in a military college where the men live together as one large fraternity" (v. III 247). When Smith and the Board faced a choice between allowing student expression and preserving a common institutional ideology, their decision was an easy one: they banned all fraternities again and used enforcement measures that they knew would work (Board of Visitors Minutes, June 29, 1885). The forbade any cadet to hold office (i.e., private secretaries to faculty, cadet librarian, etc) if they were a member of a secret society and they required all cadets to take an oath that they would not join such or that they had withdrawn their membership from such organizations (Board of Visitors Minutes, June 29, 1885). The Board also explained its decision by noting that the existence of fraternities that exclude certain cadets and that other alternative views of the VMI spirit are "highly prejudicial to good order and military discipline in a school of the distinctive character of this Institution" (Board of Visitors Minutes, June 29, 1885). Smith, in his Annual Report of June 22, 1886, reasoned that "in the Virginia Military Institute, cadets have always been bound together as a band of brothers, and if I am not mistaken, the only thing that has ever occurred to loosen that strong tie was the discordant spirit sometimes manifested among rival fraternities" (Superintendent's Report, June 22, 1886). Thus, fraternities at VMI had evolved to the point where the administration felt they threatened the bond of brotherhood based on common sentiment and

common understanding of heritage. In this sense they endangered the ability of the Institute to purvey among the cadets its ideology and the singular reading of saga this ideology fostered. Secret organizations were a threat to the development of a distinctive character based on a unified "spirit"; their eradication became a foregone conclusion.

But what freedom of expression the cadets may have lost with the abolition of fraternities they more than made up for with renewed interest in the saga of the school that gave them their only common experience. Symbolic of their involvement in the recognition by the entire Institute of its own distinctiveness was the publishing of The Bomb in 1885, the first college annual in the South (VMI Catalog, 1992-93 7). This publication was a virtual self-study of the VMI student culture as it related to the school's saga. The cadets took the VMI past as their inspiration in devoting the opening pages of the annual to a heroic poem dealing with the bravery and fame of the Institute's students:

"Virginia's sons  
Will ever, through all time, thy name revere,  
Because Virginia's heroes held it dear.  
The noble ones  
    Who gave themselves  
    All that they could give;  
    Or struggled on, until  
    Their country bade them live" (7).

As with the poems written for formal academic ceremonies by more "famous" poets, the cadets take as their topic that moment in time in which the Institute gained its "claim to history"--the Civil War. Now some twenty years removed, the war pervades the minds of many cadets who were not yet born when Lee surrendered at Appomattox. Such was the power of the Institute's relationship with the history of its region.

The annual goes on to list each fraternity on campus (despite their prohibition) and proudly points to the founding of Alpha Tau Omega (1866), Sigma Nu (1866), Kappa Sigma

Kappa (1867), and Sigma Chi (1884) at VMI (40). It also lists three athletic organizations: the Virginia Military Base Ball Nine, the VMI football team, and the VMI Athletic Association (41). Along with the fraternities, the cadets mention the mysterious "Molly McGuires," who always numbered 13 (if indeed they existed!) and who were dedicated to unnerving the administration. The Mollys are credited with blowing up the powder magazine in late 1884 (Couper, v. III 384), but Smith could never prove their involvement because he could never identify the members of the society. If nothing else, this organization represented the unwillingness of all the cadets to *kao tao* to the administration and reveals the existence of a student subculture at VMI that has as its bond violence toward the school rather than strict adherence to its principles. Yet, even the Molly McGuires, in their rebellion against the administration, were concerned with the internal workings of the school. They were not political rebels like the protestors of the 1960's. They were VMI men who expressed their hatred of a system to which they nevertheless clung. There was a reason they never revealed their identities: in the end, staying at the Institute meant more to them than blowing it up.

This introspection, in which even student rebellion manifests itself internally, was typical at colleges after the Civil War. At VMI, it represented the cadets' decision to look within the Institute itself to find sources for expressing and defining institutional culture, whether by deciding to blow up a campus facility or by founding a fraternity. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, in her history of the development of student cultures, Campus Life, explains why this introspection may have occurred and the ramifications it held for college students:

"The Civil War had turned classmates into the soldiers of warring armies. In its aftermath, students sought harmony rather than diversion. Moreover, as college life expanded and became more elaborate, those under its canons grew more insular and inward-looking. By the late nineteenth century collegiate canons identified political concern with the world external to the college, a world that held no real interest for the undergraduate" (49).

Virginia Military seems little different from this description. The war and ensuing Reconstruction provided the perfect medium for turning away from a hostile world and revelling in the idealized world of the "college culture." The students at VMI complemented the faculty and administration's introspection by modeling their own expressions of culture on the VMI past. In this way, student culture contributed to the overall institutional ideology and ultimately, then, to saga. The faculty and administration could recognize VMI's distinctive character and Smith could even refer to in print several times, but only the students could truly live it by centering their everyday lives around it. For them, VMI was not just an educational institution. It was an unique experience they felt deeply; it stayed with them for the rest of their lives. What's more, their fellow cadets had felt it, too. The fraternities created by New Market cadets, the first baseball team, the first annuals and student magazines, the secret society that pretended to hate the Institute but never aimed its wrath anywhere else--all these activities and organizations were expressions of a culture distinctive to VMI. The cadets did not have to create symbolic rituals such as graduation or a sesquicentennial celebration to remind them of the VMI saga; they lived it everyday in their adherence to the formal "rat" process and in the ways they shaped their activities outside this process.

### **Community Relations**

Due to the introspective nature of the Institute during these years, relations with the surrounding community in Lexington are far more limited in scope than in any other period in the Institute's first fifty years. VMI had turned inward, away from external forces that it thought potentially harmful. In one case, Smith and the Board saw forces in the Lexington community itself (Washington College) as hostile. In part, this attitude arose from the perceived need for self-protection and to keep the Institute from harm's way through a virtually monastic organizational life. Smith and the Board dealt with the state only on those

occasions when it became absolutely necessary for the Institute's survival and even limited the school's contact with the Lexington/Rockbridge community on all but the most important of public occasions. In particular, the Institute's ongoing feud with Washington College continued during these years; it eventually found expression in sports rivalries among the students.

However, the Institute was all too willing to seek the recognition of the community in regard to its own heritage. This is in keeping with the concept of institutional ideology as a concept formed from internal self-awareness of a unique heritage combined with external acknowledgement of the importance of this heritage (Clark 255). In particular, one main event during the years 1866 to 1890 points out the importance of community recognition of VMI's heritage: the death of Robert E. Lee.

#### Another Row with Washington and Lee

Virginia Military and Washington College (after Lee's death in 1870, Washington and Lee College) had never enjoyed a particularly benevolent relationship. The College resented the Institute's existence from the beginning and always considered the campus next door as a threat to its own existence. After all, in a region where the number of college students was extremely low in the first place, a new rival on the scene, especially one who opens up less than 100 yards away and garners state support, can seem quite a threat. In the end, however, the Institute became less likely to steal the College's students or faculty and became yet another competitor for private donations. One such donation, made to Virginia Military by Judge Asa Packer of Philadelphia in the form of a bond purchase for \$1000 (Couper, v. III 4-6), became a source of lasting tension between the two schools. The new battle recalled turf wars of earlier decades and eventually led to new expressions of institutional rivalry.



Selling bonds became one of the chief methods the Institute used after the Civil War to refill its depleted coffers. The administration tapped all of its friends for money (and some of its erstwhile enemies, too). Asa Packer purchased a bond for \$1000 in 1866 but in writing his will some years later named Washington College a benefactor of \$4000 plus the \$1000 bond he held in the College's name (Couper, v. III 5). Unfortunately, Packer had not bought a Washington College bond. VMI interpreted the entire section of the will as a case of mistaken identity. Obviously, the Board of Visitors thought, Packer had intended the money for VMI, not Washington College, since he specifically mentioned a \$1000 bond he held and the only bond of that sum in his estate was a VMI bond. By this logic, the Institute argued that Packer intended to will both the bond value and the \$4000 sum to the Institute and not to Washington and Lee. Packer had mistaken VMI for Washington and Lee. The College disagreed and took the issue to court (5). Ultimately, Virginia Military won out and retained the entire sum of \$5000 (5). This experience fueled the belief at VMI that the only people to be trusted were what Couper calls "VMI people" (v. IV 1). In addition to state government forsaking it, the Institute now saw Washington College, a close companion in the scheme of antebellum southern society, suing it in Pennsylvania for proceeds from a northerner's estate! Reconstruction made for strange bedfellows and for even stranger court cases.

Thus, the dye was cast for the rivalry between the two schools for students and funding to continue after the Civil War much as it had prior to the war. The main difference after the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania settled the Packer case lay with the expression of this rivalry. Sports took some of the maliciousness (and certainly the litigiousness) out of the schools' mutual dislike but none of the intensity. Because of their geographical closeness, the two schools often played each other in baseball in the 1870's and 1880's (The Bomb 1914, 149) and the results frequently turned violent. Some of the contests became so bloody in fact that

only in recent years have Washington and Lee and Virginia Military played each other in intercollegiate sports.

### The Death of Lee

Given these events, it seems strange, then, that the major event during this era that revealed the Institute's desire for community recognition of its unique heritage was the death of the Robert E. Lee, the President of Washington College. Lee served as President from 1865 to 1870, pulling the struggling college back onto its feet and unwittingly founding a cult of personality among the residents of Lexington, including the "VMI people." As Douglass Southall Freeman explains, Lee felt comfortable in his academic role (he had served as Superintendent of West Point before the war) and felt, ironically, that the greatest mistake of his life had been his choice of the military as a career (v. IV 496-7). So strong were his anti-martial convictions after the war that Lee consciously walked out of step with Smith when the two marched in front of the corps of cadets on one occasion (497).

Yet all of VMI revered Lee as their own, much as the rest of the South did. He was now part symbol and part man and the perfect living monument to the South's glorious past, in which the Institute saw itself as playing a role. Understandably, then, when Lee died on October 12, 1870, (Freeman, v.IV 492) the entire region mourned the passing of a great man. At the Institute, Smith posted an order that conceded the pain that "every heart in our Southern land will receive" upon hearing of the loss (Superintendent's Orders, October 12, 1870). To reinforce the magnitude of Lee's passing in the minds of the cadets, Smith ordered that "the professors, officers, and cadets wear the usual badge of mourning" for six months (Superintendent's Orders, October 12, 1870). Smith also suspended all academic drills and duties until after Lee's funeral.

The Institute took pains to honor Lee in an appropriate manner while preserving a degree of individual expression. Freeman summarizes the funeral in the final volume of his biography of Lee, R.E. Lee:

"On the morning of October 15 a long procession of old soldiers, students, V.M.I. cadets, townspeople, and dignitaries formed in front of the presidents house at 10 o'clock and moved through the principal streets of the town, with Traveller following directly behind the empty hearse. . .No flags were put on the coffin, none were carried in the procession, and few were flown anywhere in the town except at the V.M.I. From its turrets the banners of the fifteen Southern states were hung at half-mast. The only martial notes were supplied from the cadet corps and band, and by the booming of minute-guns from the parade ground of the institute" (v. 4 527).

The Institute saw Lee's funeral as an important opportunity to reemphasize, in a communal setting, its link with the Old South and with Old Virginia. As a result of the Institute's role in Lee's funeral, the whole of the South as well as Lexington could little doubt the importance the Institute placed on its southern heritage. The flags over the barracks' battlements represented the Institute's unalterable support for the ideals of the old Confederacy; and, the martial flavor of the Institute's role in the funeral served to remind the onlookers of the Institute's heritage in regard to the Confederacy and the South. The flags, the military music, and the cannon fire may have paid tribute to Lee, but in their distinction from other forms of mourning, they were also a public form of self-tribute as well. No one who attended the funeral could fail to realize where VMI's ideological roots ran: to the South, to the honorable white male (such as Lee), and to the glory of life and death on the field of honor (as in the Civil War).

Moreover, in the wake of Lee's death, the trustees of Washington College appointed Custis Lee, on faculty at VMI since 1865, as the school's new President. Again the Institute could point to one of its own as a community figure whose family name and Civil War legacy attached themselves to the VMI heritage--however briefly (Board of Visitors Report, January

5, 1871). Custis' name alone became further proof of the Institute's ties to the antebellum past of Old Virginia, where the Lees stood in time-honored reverence along with those of other great men affiliated with the mission of Virginia Military.

### **Architecture and Facilities**

If one sees the VMI campus as a symbol for the welfare of the school at the end of the Civil War, then Virginia Military retained some shell of its former existence but faced the realization that new adaptations to a changed environment were necessary for continued survival. In his raid on Lexington, Hunter had burned "the barracks, the residences of Colonel Gilham and Colonel Williamson, the Mess Hall, and the nearby house of Governor John Letcher" (Lyle 110). Only Smith's residence, which Hunter had used it for his personal headquarters while in Lexington, the Porter's Lodge, and the Hospital remained standing (110). There was much work to be done in the months and years immediately following the war to reconstruct the Institute. Smith and the Board were required to rethink the reasons for the original planning of the campus design and the original reasons for deciding upon the neo-Gothic style of the buildings. In this process, which included some noteworthy architectural and landscaping projects, the Institute revisited its past architecturally. Expressions of the emerging campus ideology and attendant institutional saga manifested themselves in the form of projects outside the scope of simply restoring what existed prior to Hunter's raid. After the war, then, Virginia Military sought to retain links to heritage in reconstructing its buildings and grounds. In the end, the rebuilt campus represented, in a physical sense, the Institute's new found saga--there were antebellum buildings, newly restored barracks that mimicked the old design but that were forever linked to Hunter's raid, and new memorials that encompassed the Institute's post-war attempts to revere its own past.

Smith wasted little time in beginning the reconstruction phase, both in terms of financing new buildings and in establishing through facilities planning the Institute's link to its past. Early in 1866, Smith designated a plot of land on campus as a "cemetery for cadets" (Superintendent's Report, June 27, 1866). The Institute had already returned the New Market cadets to the Institute in May 1866 and Smith anticipated that "many others of our alumni, who now sleep on the battlefield, will be brought to the Institute. . ." (Superintendent's Report, June 27, 1866). In the same report, the Superintendent also noted that with a Board of Visitors' order of April 19, 1866, he had taken "immediate steps. . .to effect a restoration of the buildings of the Institute. . ." (Superintendent's Report, June 27, 1866).

In the meantime, the administration housed the cadets in temporary cabins on the campus and conducted class in existing buildings such as the hospital (Lyle 110-11). Smith forbade the curious cadets from snooping around the burned-out shell of the old barracks (Special Order No. 30, December 7, 1866, Superintendent's Orders, 1866). Around the same time, the first business on campus devoted solely to the cadets sprang up. The VMI musicians, whose primary responsibility entailed playing marching music for the cadets during their drills and parades, operated the new store (Special Order No. 45, January 16, 1867, Superintendent's Orders, 1867) that sold clothing and foods for purchase. The Institute was truly becoming more self-sufficient.

By 1868, the Institute had completed at least one of its restorations on campus and was well on the way to completing another. Special Order Number 50, dated May 6, 1868, announced that the new library was operational (Superintendent's Orders, 1868). Private contributors had donated approximately 1,500 volumes to the Institute (Couper, v. III 193). In a malicious act that left him forever vilified by Lexingtonians, David Hunter had burned the entire VMI library in 1864 as well as the Washington College library. Recreating the

library, while a small triumph, revealed the emphasis the Institute placed on its academic mission; a library was as essential as a barracks for the survival of the Institute.

Moreover, Smith opened some sections of the restored barracks to the cadets in 1868 and early 1869, even though the entire facility was not yet completed (Couper, v. III 204). The Institute had financed the restorations from a mix of sources: state bonds, donations from individuals, withholdings from faculty pay, and increased student tuition for regular cadets (Superintendent's Report, June 25, 1868). Finally, the cadets' barracks was completed and ready for full use by Fall 1869 (Couper, v. III 204). The Institute had made a remarkable recovery in the five years since its virtual eradication.

Now, Smith felt comfortable enough that the basic facilities needs of the corps were met to work on a special project that represented the Institute's commitment to its heritage. James McDowell, the son of Governor James McDowell, who had proven so instrumental in helping to found the Institute, wrote to Smith that while in France he had purchased portraits of Lee and Jackson and had decided to send them to Virginia Military:

"I have addressed these portraits to you that they may by your care be placed in the gallery of pictures belonging to the Virginia Military Institute. . .

"I trust these images of immortal men may arouse the emulation of many generations of noble youths trained at Lexington and stimulate them to exert themselves to continue unbroken the long line of illustrious and pure patriots who have made Virginia's name most glorious" (Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, September 30, 1869).

The "gallery" to which McDowell refers was the W.W. Corcoran art exhibit housed in the old Porter's Lodge (Superintendent's Report, June 24, 1872) and funded by donations from the Washington, D.C., philanthropist and namesake of the present Corcoran Gallery in Washington, and by G.W.C. Lee. William Washington, the fine arts professor from 1869 to 1870, also made his office and workspace in the gallery (see the Academic Affairs section of

this chapter). The gallery represented the administration's belief that carefully chosen artwork could symbolize to cadets and faculty alike the source of Virginia Military's heritage. These likenesses, which conjured up memories or ideals specific to events in VMI's history, occupied their own important place on campus, even in a time when buildings with more practical use, such as the hospital, stood in need of attention.

The administration also took efforts to improve the general appearance of the grounds in these years. Smith noted in his June 25, 1889, Superintendent's Report that a great many trees had been planted on the Institute grounds since 1839 and that every attempt had been made to make the grounds as attractive as possible (Superintendent's Report 1889). Earlier, in 1873, Smith commented that he wanted to plant more trees in order "to afford shade and beautify the grounds" (Superintendent's Report, June 25, 1873). These ideas are somewhat unusual coming from Smith, who was rarely given to supporting extraneous niceties at a military college, especially during difficult fiscal times. Obviously, the Superintendent felt that these efforts to cultivate the overall campus appearance were well worth the money or he assuredly would never have endorsed them. The beautification project, including additional work on the Cadets' Cemetery (Superintendent's Report, June 28, 1878), provided another example of the Institute's introspective character. Practicality was no longer the sole consideration in caring for the school. Creating a physical aura on campus that was worthy of the Institute's noble heritage had become equally important.

## **Conclusion**

The years 1866 to 1890 brought Virginia Military face to face with its own unique institutional character, primarily because of the hardships imposed by the Civil War and the fundamental change in the school's relationship with Reconstruction state government. Thrust

back upon its own initiatives to survive openly hostile critics and financial exigency, VMI reconjured glorious elements of its own past as ideological source material. Like much of the South during Reconstruction, the Institute found solace only in a past that lay beyond the hands of the Radical Republicans and other change-minded groups. VMI soon associated change with the evils of Reconstruction and the mindset of groups that sought to vilify or render useless the antebellum southern viewpoint. In this context, the Institute molded an ideology--a world view--based on ideals and events in its own past. This ideology was conservative, even reactionary sometimes in nature, and sought to give VMI a reason to revere its heritage when many other groups in society held contempt for it.

Eventually, this ideology, introspective as it was, gave all elements of the school--faculty, administration, students, alumni, committed outsiders--what Burton Clark calls "sense of saga," the belief in an embellished rendering of the expression of institutional mission through time (235). More than an understanding of uniqueness, a "sense of saga" connotes an understanding of the historical heritage of an organization by its members and the institutionalization of that heritage through culture. Moreover, universal recognition of a common institutionalized culture based on heritage soon gave the Institute an *esprit de corps*, an emotional feeling of difference that Clark calls "institutional distinctiveness."

One sees this distinctiveness most clearly for the first time at VMI's Semicentennial Celebration in 1889. Via the presence of students, alumni, faculty, and friends of the Institute who shared the VMI experience through the years, saga took on an immediate and emotional meaning. The Semi-Centennial made sure that the expression of mission over a fifty year period, in all its reincarnations, became transfixed, timeless. All of the experiences of fifty years came together at one place and one time, creating an epiphany of sorts for those men



and women associated with the Institute. Theirs was a school directly tied to history. And through the bloodshed of their students, alumni, and faculty they could prove it. VMI was no ordinary school and its ideology sought to reestablish this fact continuously and to guard against any reinterpretation of saga. The Civil War had turned upside down the ideals and morays of the culture upon which the Institute had modeled its mission. Now that VMI had reestablished a strong sense of institutional identity--reverence for its own past had given it this--it had no intention of ever losing it again.

## **CHAPTER SIX: EPILOGUE--CONCLUSIONS AND LEGACIES**

If we could magically travel back in time to the Virginia Military Institute of 1890, we would see different buildings (although a similar architecture), different cadets (although young men from the same Virginia families would still walk the parade ground), and different faculty (although they would still bear rank and still teach many of the same subjects). In essence, we would have little trouble in recognizing VMI as VMI. This short daydream reveals just how little the Institute has changed in the last 100 years. And, were it not for forces beyond even the reach of the powerful VMI alumni, this scene would have remained largely unchanged for another 100 years.

This study has not sought to ascertain the nature of the well-publicized changes that faced VMI in the 1990's, but, rather, to achieve an understanding of why VMI has remained basically unchanged for so long, why it is so different from all other colleges and universities, and why it fought the changes of the late 1980's and early 1990's so earnestly. As a closing section, this chapter will delineate the broad overarching reasons for the Institute's conservatism and unwillingness to change through time and will seek to apply these ideas to the recent battle over the admission of women to the Institute.

### **The Pitfalls of Distinctiveness**

Establishing a distinctive nature at a college or university entails a good many advantages. Of particular importance, distinctive colleges often draw students from a well-defined population, meaning that there are often many more applicants than positions open

in the freshman class (Townsend, et al. 37-38; Clark 262). Most distinctive colleges achieved their distinctiveness from their competitive admissions; and, subsequently, they retain competitive admissions precisely because they are distinctive. Also, there is a certain spiritual reward for becoming involved in an organization with a well-established saga. "In offering so much thrill and pleasure, a saga maximizes for the individual the esthetic rewards of administration and group membership. The organizational means become beautiful ends in themselves" (Clark 262).

But when these "means" supplant reality itself by choking off any adaptability to needed change, distinctiveness and saga can become a liability to a college. Clark also writes that

"In emphasizing one value, they [distinctive colleges] underplay, oppose, or ignore others. In securing the loyalty of one segment of society, they may secure the hostility of others. In committing the organization strongly to one path of action, they find it difficult at a later time to take another route or otherwise to adapt as new demands are made upon them. . ." (258).

A form of institutional *rigor mortis* can set in. Unable to see beyond the "beauty" of its own machinations, the distinctive college can become an anachronism. Clark characterizes this process:

"The ultimate risk of distinctive character is that of success in one era breeding rigidity and stagnation in a later one. Commitments are precise rather than diffuse, sharply made rather than dully connected, articulated rather than unspoken; in short they constitute a formula for later trouble" (259).

Townsend, et al., are a bit more specific. They foresee this "trouble" as a fight for survival if distinctiveness prevents change in the face of "emerging environmental forces" (39).

Perhaps Virginia Military is in danger of courting such "trouble?" As a distinctive college, VMI's organizational ideology has always limited its environmental adaptability. Prior

to the lawsuit of 1989, this sluggishness rarely presented a problem. The Institute has never really faced a change comparable to the magnitude of admitting women since Hunter's destruction of 1864! Quite likely, then, the complacent organizational attitude exhibited by Virginia Military since the late nineteenth century accounts for the ferocity of the school's fight to stay all-male. The Institute's ability to adapt to women in the corps may say volumes about its ability to stave off the label of "anachronism." Ironically, the lawsuit may make VMI more distinctive rather than less so, as it fears. Thousands of new, potential recruits--women and men--heard of the Institute for the first time as a result of the publicity generated by the lawsuit and are no doubt intrigued by its elitism and historical heritage. If it chooses to keep its size constant, the Institute could become even more selective because of the increased ratio of applicants to acceptances.

### **The Role of Honor in Preserving Ideology and Distinctiveness**

The Government Affairs section of Chapter Five explains in-depth many of the reasons for VMI's reactionary nature. Most are associated with the school's need after the Civil War to look to the past to find shards of heritage for recreating an organizational identity. VMI could no longer rely on state government for help so it became more self-sufficient. Institutional leaders associated change with the destruction of the Civil War and with the hostile attitude of Reconstructionist politicians. In the end, the combination of a romanticized past with the well-founded fear of outside change fostered an institutional ideology that revered and conserved institutional heritage.

With this ideology came saga, and, eventually distinctiveness. This distinctive feeling stemmed from an embellished self-awareness of historical difference and significance. And, while much of the Institute's "claim to a place in history" came as a result of its Civil War

exploits, elements critical for placing these events within a socio-historical context were part of VMI's antebellum heritage. Without these elements there could have been no distinctiveness. They, too, were part of the institution's saga. For example, New Market was an important act of cadet bravery, but its symbolic meaning becomes apparent only when one sees the battle as an expression of the Institute's ultimate loyalty to the southern cause and to the system of honor that precipitated that cause. The cadets could face death at New Market because the alternative--flight from the battlefield-- would have meant something worse than death: a loss of honor.

The fight for honor--and to many southerners that is precisely why the South fought the Civil War--was ingrained at VMI from its very first day of operation. After the war, the Institute used the honor system as a means for instilling in its cadets and its faculty a continued reverence for the "cluster of ethical rules. . .by which judgements of behavior are ratified by community consensus" that had existed before and during the war (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor xv). But there was a difference. The "community" that had "ratified" individual behavior before the war was gone. No matter--VMI became its own community and applied its own brand of the honor system, its own "cluster of ethical rules" that were decidedly antebellum in nature to its organizational decision-making. For VMI, the "rules" did not change, even though external interpretations of honor may have changed. Isolated from the community, Virginia Military could afford to live by the same ethical code it had lived by before the war. Honor became a critical compound in the glue that bonded together the disparate components of the Institute into a cohesive, distinctive organization with one voice and one perception of its saga. Honor required that military prowess accompany the definition of manhood. Honor required that white males hold ultimate authority in society and that they both "fear" and love women. Honor decreed that "ferocity of will" in the face of insurmountable odds serve as the "sign of inner merit" (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor 34).

In the end, based as it was on a version that no longer really existed outside the campus walls, VMI's version of honor became part and parcel of the Institute's conservative ideology.

In a more modern context, Virginia Military's unique expression of the honor code played a significant role in the school's battle to exclude women. Although the Institute's supporters never used the premise as an argument for retaining all-male admissions, VMI's ultimate belief that honor requires them to fight any change to the VMI system on the basis of principle alone certainly undergirded the male-only system. As Wyatt-Brown notes in Southern Honor, one of the critical components of primal honor is its intrinsic relationship to "personal bravery" (35). Fighting the Federal government to the last gasp, even in the face of insurmountable odds, exemplified the Institute's belief that honor--the "cluster of ethical codes" by which it defines right and wrong in a social context--required it to fight. In much the same way that the New Market cadets had marched straight into the Federal lines to prove their personal honor and the honor of the Institute through warfare, so too did the modern-day VMI look the Federals in the eye once again in a Roanoke courtroom. The battlefields had changed, but the Institute's reasons for fighting were much the same.

Another unwritten reason related to the concept of honor that prompted VMI to fight the admission of women came from the organizational belief in male dominance and the subsequent belief that the VMI system of combining violence and honor in a military fashion is, historically, a uniquely male form of expressing honor. Prior to the Civil War, "all ranks of men agreed that women, like other dependents upon male leadership and livelihood, should be subordinate, docile" (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor 228). Moreover,

"southern male honor required that women be burdened with a multitude of negatives, a not very subtle way to preserve male initiative in the never-ending battle of the sexes. Female honor had always been the exercise of restraint and abstinence. 'She cannot give utterance to her passions like a man,' commanded T.R. Dew of William

and Mary College. 'She must suppress the most violent feelings. . .'" (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor 227).

These attitudes are alive and well at the Virginia Military Institute of the late twentieth century. VMI's interpretation of honor, remaining essentially antebellum in character, preserves male dominance and holds that women should "suppress" the inherent "violent feelings" that come with military training. Thus, the argument that women should be admitted at the Institute in light of their successes at the federal military academies carries little or no weight with VMI supporters. VMI believes women should be excluded from the corps of cadets because primal honor dictates that military training remain a male exercise. Women may be able to cope with the rigors of such training, but that hardly equates with the central question in the minds of VMI supporters: do women, as a sex, not as individuals, have a place in engaging in such training in the first place? For Virginia Military, that answer is "no."

Moreover, like antebellum southerners, the Institute entertains a perception of women based on both love and fear (Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor 51-53). While the Institute reveres women as wives and mothers (much as it revered Margaret Junkin Preston as J.T.L. Preston's wife and "Stonewall" Jackson's sister-in-law), it also fears them. Women represent change at Virginia Military, and threaten to destroy the Institute's century-and-a-half-old interpretation of honor as a male dominated system where only men may actively pursue military activities.

### **"VMI People": Cliques and Claques**

William Couper, whose four volume centennial history of Virginia Military Institute provides a thorough if not objective overview of the institution's history, refers often in his work to "VMI people"--presumably those men and women who consider themselves the friends of the Institute. Couper's use of this term is more than happenstance. It helps to explain

another important reason why VMI has remained so very distinctive through the last century: the homogeneity of its support. In simple English, VMI is one large fraternity whose members share a common experience based on the "rat" system. It is a living example of the power of the "old boy network."

Think back, for example, on all the countless instances before the war where the Institute found much needed support for its programs from a legislature that saw public education as tantamount to social leprosy. Even when certain members of the General Assembly proved hostile towards the institution, other, more important members of the government (often led by the governor himself) came to the school's rescue. There was a legacy intact at VMI--that predated the school's founding--of powerful men in influential places who looked after the Institute. Few colleges could boast of such beneficence from public figures. These benefactors were among the most influential men in the commonwealth and they counted themselves and VMI counted them as "VMI people."

After the Civil War, influential alumni and friends, many of whom represented the leadership of southern society, (the Lees, Mahone) safeguarded its interests. Note, too, how keenly the Board and the alumni felt the necessity of appointing Shipp as Superintendent at Smith's resignation. Shipp would ensure continuity; he was a VMI man and, as such, committed to the school. By 1890, an entire generation of alumni had bought into the VMI ideology, had understood the VMI saga, and had recently felt their alma mater's distinctiveness at its sesquicentennial. These were the men who led the Institute into the new century. Like Shipp, they were devoted to keeping alive the VMI *esprit de corps* in an era of rapid change. This meant banding together and trusting only one another, much as it had during the decades just after the Civil War. Keeping to itself, isolated in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, and protected by a holy order of alumni knights, VMI withstood the ravages



of time for an entire century after Smith's death. VMI graduates became influential men in Virginia, as they always have, and they made sure to protect their alma mater. In a state as conservative as Virginia in the early and middle twentieth century, this was not a difficult task. The Institute could count on the conservation of its heritage because the citizens of the state conserved a similar heritage.

By the late 1980's and early 1990's, though, Virginia had changed, even if VMI had not. L.Douglas Wilder became the commonwealth's first black governor in 1990, representing a willingness among much of the populace to debate the state's ideological foundations. A year earlier, in October of 1989, a woman from northern Virginia attempted to secure admission at VMI. The Institute refused to admit her on basis of her sex. In turn, the applicant filed a formal complaint with the Office of Civil Rights, United State Department of Education. OCR contacted the Justice Department who mandated that VMI admit women within 30 days--a lawsuit was born. Since this study makes no pretensions of serving as a legal history of the single-sex admissions lawsuit against VMI, these facts provide sufficient context. The important argument here centers on another reason for the Institute's willingness to fight the Justice Department's order: loss of an insular culture based on male exclusivity.

Anyone who enjoys the membership of the Masons, the Knights of Columbus, or even a college fraternity can attest to the appeal of a secret society made up of one's own kind. In these organizations, individual members can count on friendship and comradery from men who understand them on a level that no one else can, simply because of their shared experience of some type of initiation process. This bond accurately characterizes VMI men as well. The rat year gives them all a common experience that bonds them together for life. The Institute fears, and rightly so, that any change in this initiation experience will change the character of the entire school--a character these men understand and in which they take a form of refuge

from the realities of a complex, modern society. Moreover, the loss of an all-male "network" comprised of thousands of alumni with common attitudes could dilute the power, both political and social, of the Institute's faithful in the state and region. As one cadet told a reporter in explaining his reason for attending VMI, ". . . ." The admission of women could jeopardize this carefully hidden benefit.

### **The Critical Question**

Safeguarding tradition is a noble pursuit, especially when those traditions provide society with a link to its past. Virginia Military's traditions, as part of its continuing institutional saga, represent a vehicle for visiting a time that no longer exists. The nineteenth century is alive and well at VMI primarily because the Institute has jealously guarded its saga via the perpetuation of tradition. In turn, these traditions teach us about Virginia's history and, indeed, that of the entire nation, during the most tumultuous years of the last century. The historian is forever indebted to VMI for preserving itself as an artifact from these years and we can learn much about ourselves from its rich history.

Yet Virginia Military is not a museum; it is an educational institution with broad public responsibilities. Ultimately, the admissions controversy at VMI set the stage for finally placing the mission, saga, and distinctive character of the Institute in a broader social context, something that has never really happened at VMI since its development as a distinctive college in the late 1880's. Perhaps this development can be best phrased in the form of a question: where do our priorities lie--with Virginia Military's traditions and its reverence for the past or with our fundamental commitment as a society to equal opportunity at public educational institutions? The United States Supreme Court decided in favor of the latter. Importantly, too, we must see the entire controversy as a public/private issue, not as a single sex education issue. Wabash College and Hampden-Sydney College admit only males and no one sought to

sue them. Dozens of all female private colleges still exist (and Virginia retains its share) and no one sought to sue them. This was a controversy rooted in reestablishing the primacy of "fairness" in a social institution that has heretofore escaped attention because of regional isolation.

In the interests of institutional survival and success, Virginia Military should choose to view the admission of women in its ranks as a new chapter in its noble institutional saga, to secret away for posterity's sake the legends of its second battle with the Federal government in the mountains of Virginia, and to view the entire affair as further proof of the Institute's indefatigable spirit in the face of immense social change. Confronting the unknown is a scary proposition for any organization and the admission of women presents such an unknown quantity to the Institute. But is this prospect any more frightening than that faced by Beverly Stanard and the other young men at New Market who faced a barrage of Union gunfire? Decidedly not, and it was their bravery and sacrifice that made the Institute distinctive and left for it a heritage that it carries forward today. There is little reason to believe that today's cadets cannot exhibit the same bravery and the same sacrifice in the face of adversity and, in so doing, complement the Institute's saga in a fashion similar to that of their legendary New Market brethren.

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